

POEMS
BY
JEAN INGELow

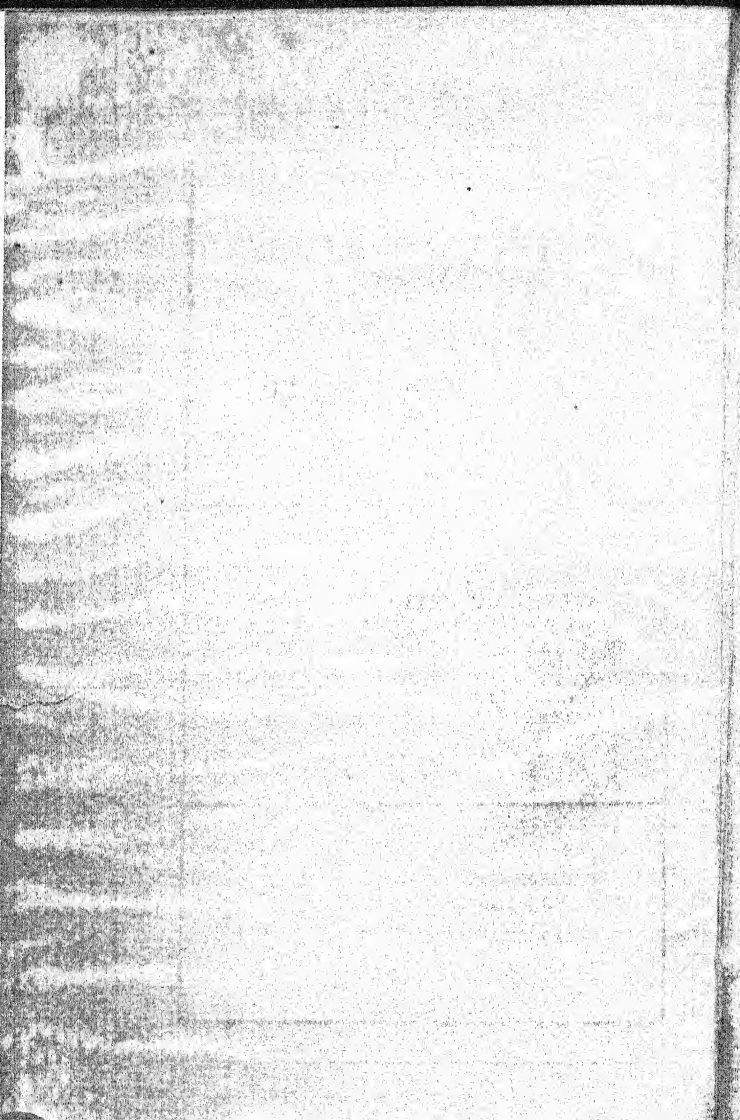
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
ALICE MEYNELL

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JEAN INGELOW

From a photograph by Elliott & Fry



If some among our poets have been more praised than read, one here and there has been more read than praised. So it was with Jean Ingelow. Even in the memorial notices of her death, the merits of her verse and the extent of her fame were rather taken for granted than explained. A student of poetry, nevertheless, might find it worth while to seek for the cause of this general acceptance, whether in the picturesqueness of her lyrical stories, in which was a kind of popularising of the "Pre-Raphaelite movement", still recent when Miss Ingelow began to write; in the essential readableness of her easy verse; or in the moral sweetness and cleanness of the whole world of fancy in which she sings.

Her metre is a very important matter in her poetry. Important in all poetry, it expresses all that is best and all that is least valuable in Jean Ingelow's. It is measured by a good ear, but not by a strict law; and we may take it that the general public has a good ear and cares little for law. Her poems have often a simple resonance without error and without indecision; and they leave in the mind the charming memory less of a

song than of a call. In her best verse there is something that may be likened to the beauty of a speaking voice, and one that is lifted across free fields, over water, and into open skies. "The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire" has calls to the cows, and tunes of bells; "Echo and the Ferry" is full of crossing calls—a game of clamorous and quickly subsiding words, hollow from the hill of a leafy summer; in "Divided" there are cries that by degrees grow inaudible with distance. Again, there is—a less favourable example—the refrain which Calverley imitated in merry caricature. Of the poem just mentioned—"Divided"—we might ask uneasy questions as to the process of the growth of the severing waters. Did the lovers leap the smaller tributaries and swim the greater? The poem, albeit this little matter of physics may have been overlooked by an impulsive poet, is full of charm, not the least being a series of landscapes:

An empty sky, a world of heather,
and again

A dappled sky, a world of meadows,
and the change from the "milk-white river"
at early morning, and the apple orchards,
to barer, sandier, and rounder hills, the
prows, and sails, and lights of the west.

*All this is pleasant, but there are two poems that are much more—"The High Tide" and "The Coming in of the Mermaid". "The High Tide" is best printed with modern spelling, inasmuch as, though it pretends to be a tale told at her spinning-wheel by a woman in the sixteenth century, it is manifestly a tale written at her desk by a woman in the nineteenth. "The level sun, like ruddy ore", a figure "dark against day's golden death", the image of the rearing *Lindis* met by the tidal wave, "shaped like a curling snow-white cloud", and the "sobbing river"—all these are unmistakably modern, but not to be complained of unless when the author spells up "uppe". "The High Tide" has the rare quality of simple dramatic narrative of action. Assuredly nothing could be better told than this:—*

*So far, so fast the eygre drave,
The heart had hardly time to beat,
Before a shallow seething wave
Sobbed in the grasses at our feet:
The feet had hardly time to flee
Before it brake against the knee,
And all the world was in the sea.*

*Yet finer, if finer could be—the briefest,
most active, most spacious lines—follow:—*

*That flow strewed wrecks about the grass,
That ebb swept out the flocks to sea.*

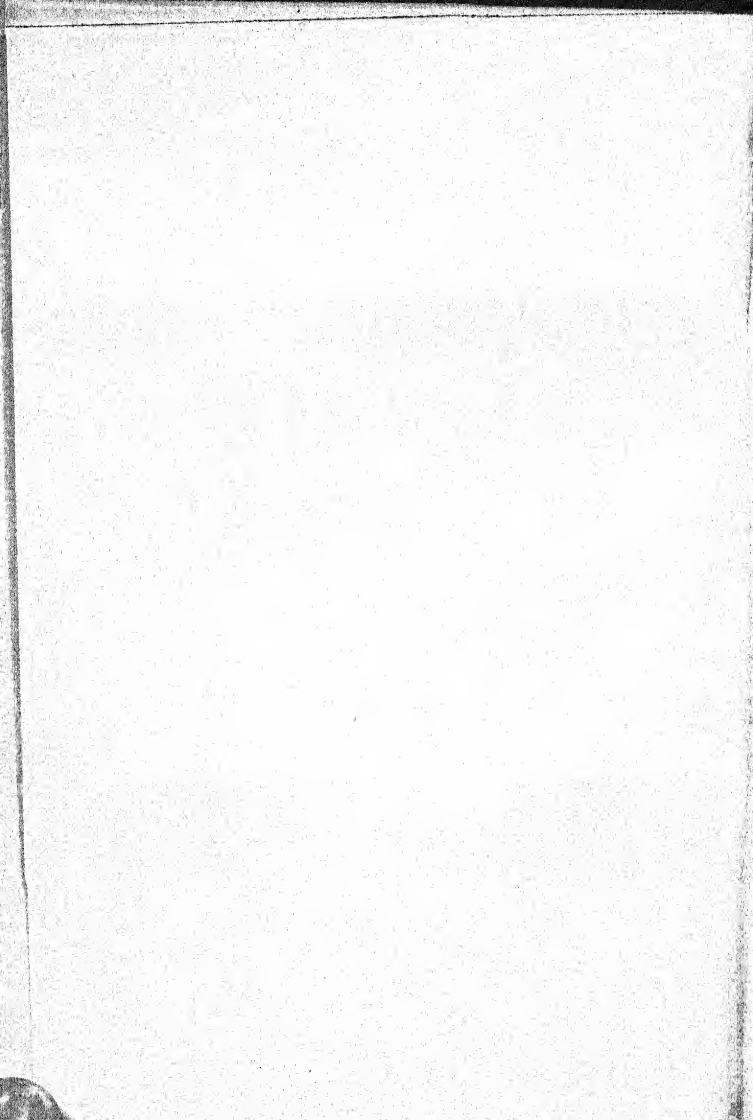
The Boston bells ceasing not to ring the tune of dismay, "The Brides of Enderby", fill the stanzas with a changing, swelling, and hurrying music that is most beautiful; and the whole poem gives a kind of reluctant proof of the degree of true and legitimate art of which this poet was capable, but to which she seldom set her hand in earnest.

Jean Ingelow is imitable in the fashion she set, of doves, milking-pails, daisies, and weather (with its few rhymes)—a fashion of which the day is long over-past. But she is not imitable in the brief masterly passages of her best and more truly memorable lyrics.

ALICE MEYNELL.

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Divided

I

An empty sky, a world of heather,
Purple of foxglove, yellow of broom;
We two among them wading together,
Shaking out honey, treading perfume.

Crowds of bees are giddy with clover,
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at our feet,
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over,
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet.

Flusheth the rise with her purple favour,
Gloweth the cleft with her golden ring,
'Twixt the two brown butterflies waver
Lightly settle, and sleepily swing.

We two walk till the purple dieth
And short dry grass under foot is brown,
But one little streak at a distance lieth
Green like a ribbon to prank the down.

DIVIDED

II

Over the grass we stepped unto it,
And God He knoweth how blithe we
were!

Never a voice to bid us eschew it:
Hey the green ribbon that showed so fair!

Hey the green ribbon! we kneeled beside
it,

We parted the grasses dewy and sheen;
Drop over drop there filtered and slid
A tiny bright beck that trickled between.

Tinkle, tinkle, sweetly it sung to us,
Light was our talk as of faëry bells—
Faëry wedding-bells faintly rung to us
Down in their fortunate parallels.

Hand in hand, while the sun peered over,
We lapped the grass on that youngling
spring;

Swept back its rushes, smoothed its clover,
And said, "Let us follow it westering."

III

A dappled sky, a world of meadows,
Circling above us the black rooks fly
Forward, backward; lo, their dark shadows
Flit on the blossoming tapestry—

DIVIDED

Flit on the beck, for her long grass parteth
As hair from a maid's bright eyes blown
back;

And, lo, the sun like a lover darteth
His flattering smile on her wayward
track.

Sing on! we sing in the glorious weather
Till one steps over the tiny strand,
So narrow, in sooth, that still together
On either brink we go hand in hand.

The beck grows wider, the hands must
sever.

On either margin, our songs all done,
We move apart, while she singeth ever,
Taking the course of the stooping sun.

He prays, "Come over"—I may not follow;
I cry, "Return"—but he cannot come:
We speak, we laugh, but with voices hol-
low;

Our hands are hanging, our hearts are
numb.

IV

A breathing sigh, a sigh for answer,
A little talking of outward things:
The careless beck is a merry dancer,
Keeping sweet time to the air she sings.

DIVIDED

A little pain when the beck grows wider;
"Cross to me now — for her wavelets
swell:"

"I may not cross"—and the voice beside her
Faintly reacheth, though heeded well.

No backward path; ah! no returning;
No second crossing that ripple's flow:
"Come to me now, for the west is burning;
Come ere it darkens;"—"Ah, no! ah,
no!"

Then cries of pain, and arms outreaching—
The beck grows wider and swift and
deep:
Passionate words as of one beseeching—
The loud beck drowns them; we walk,
and weep.

v

A yellow moon in splendour drooping,
A tired queen with her state oppressed,
Low by rushes and swordgrass stooping,
Lies she soft on the waves at rest.

The desert heavens have felt her sadness;
Her earth will weep her some dewy
tears;
The wild beck ends her tune of gladness,
And goeth stilly as soul that fears.

DIVIDED

We two walk on in our grassy places
On either marge of the moonlit flood,
With the moon's own sadness in our faces,
Where joy is withered, blossom and bud.

VI

A shady freshness, chafers whirring,
A little piping of leaf-hid birds;
A flutter of wings, a fitful stirring,
A cloud to the eastward snowy as curds.

Bare grassy slopes, where kids are teth-
ered
Round valleys like nests all ferny-lined;
Round hills, with fluttering tree-tops fea-
thered,
Swell high in their freckled robes be-
hind.

A rose-flush tender, a thrill, a quiver,
When golden gleams to the tree-tops
glide;
A flashing edge for the milk-white river,
The beck, a river—with still sleek tide.

Broad and white, and polished as silver,
On she goes under fruit-laden trees;
Sunk in leafage cooeth the culver,
And 'plaineth of love's disloyalties.

DIVIDED

VIII

And yet I know past all doubting, truly—
A knowledge greater than grief can
dim—

I know, as he loved, he will love me
duly—

Yea, better—e'en better than I love him.

And as I walk by the vast calm river,
The awful river so dread to see,
I say, "Thy breadth and thy depth for
ever
Are bridged by his thoughts that cross
to me."

Honours



PART I

A Scholar is musing on his want of success

To strive—and fail. Yes, I did strive and
fail,

I set mine eyes upon a certain night
To find a certain star—and could not hail
With them its deep-set light.

Fool that I was! I will rehearse my fault:
I, wingless, thought myself on high to
lift

Among the winged—I set these feet that
halt

To run against the swift.

And yet this man, that loved me so, can
write—

That loves me, I would say, can let me
see,

Or fain would have me think, he counts
but light

These Honours lost to me.

HONOURS

The Letter of his friend

"What are they? that old house of yours
which gave
Such welcomes oft to me, the sunbeams
fall
Still, down the squares of blue and white
which pave
Its hospitable hall.

"A brave old house! a garden full of bees,
Large dropping poppies, and Queen hol-
lihocks,
With butterflies for crowns—tree peonies
And pinks and goldilocks.

"Go, when the shadow of your house is
long
Upon the garden—when some new-
waked bird,
Pecking and fluttering, chirps a sudden
song,
And not a leaf is stirred;

"But every one drops dew from either
edge
Upon its fellow, while an amber ray
Slants up among the tree-tops like a wedge
Of liquid gold—to play

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HONOURS

Its reverent wonders, and its doubtings
sore,
Its adorations blind;

"The thunder of its war-songs, and the
glow
Of chants to freedom by the old world
sung;
The sweet love cadences that long ago
Dropped from the old-world tongue.

"And then this new-world lore that takes
account
Of tangled star-dust; maps the triple
whirl
Of blue and red and argent worlds that
mount
And greet the IRISH EARL;

"Or float across the tube that HERSCHEL
sways,
Like pale-rose chaplets, or like sapphire
mist;
Or hang or droop along the heavenly ways,
Like scarves of amethyst.

"O strange it is and wide the new-world
lore,
For next it treateth of our native dust!

HONOURS

Must dig out buried monsters, and explore
The green earth's fruitful crust;

"Must write the story of her seething
youth—

How lizards paddled in her lukewarm
seas;

Must show the cones she ripened, and
forsooth

Count seasons on her trees;

"Must know her weight, and pry into
her age,

Count her old beach lines by their tidal
swell;

Her sunken mountains name, her craters
gauge,

Her cold volcanoes tell;

"And treat her as a ball, that one might
pass

From this hand to the other—such a
ball

As he could measure with a blade of grass,
And say it was but small!

"Honours! O friend, I pray you bear
with me:

The grass hath time to grow in meadow
lands,

HONOURS

Wrest not fair reasoning to a crooked
end:

False, false, as you are true!

But I read on: "And so it was with
me;

Your golden constellations lying apart
They neither hailed nor greeted heartily,
Nor noted on their chart.

"And yet to you and not to me belong
Those finer instincts that, like second
sight
And hearing, catch creation's undersong,
And see by inner light.

"You are a well, whereon I, gazing,
see
Reflections of the upper heavens—a
well
From whence come deep, deep echoes up
to me—
Some underwave's low swell.

"I cannot soar into the heights you show,
Nor dive among the deeps that you re-
veal;
But it is much that high things ARE to
know,
That deep things ARE to feel.

HONOURS

"'T is yours, not mine, to pluck out of
your breast

Some human truth, whose workings re-
condite

Were unattired in words, and manifest
And hold it forth to light

"And cry, 'Behold this thing that I have
found.'

And though they knew not of it till that
day,

Nor should have done with no man to
expound

Its meaning, yet they say,

"'We do accept it: lower than the shoals

We skim, this diver went, nor did create,
But find it for us deeper in our souls

Than we can penetrate.'

"You were to me the world's interpreter,

The man that taught me Nature's un-
known tongue,

And to the notes of her wild dulcimer

First set sweet words and sung.

"And what am I to you? A steady hand

To hold, a steadfast heart to trust
withal;

(B 942)

HONOURS

Merely a man that loves you, and will
stand

By you, whate'er befall.

"But need we praise his tendance tutelar
Who feeds a flame that warms him?
Yet 'tis true

I love you for the sake of what you are,
And not of what you do:—

"As heaven's high twins, whereof in
Tyrian blue

The one revolveth: through his course
immense

Might love his fellow of the damask hue,
For like, and difference.

"For different pathways evermore decreed
To intersect, but not to interfere;

For common goal, two aspects, and one
speed,

One centre and one year;

"For deep affinities, for drawings strong,
That by their nature each must needs
exert;

For loved alliance, and for union long,
That stands before desert.

HONOURS

“And yet desert makes brighter not the
less,

For nearest his own star he shall not
fail

To think those rays unmatched for noble-
ness,

That distance counts but pale.

“Be pale afar, since still to me you shine,
And must while Nature’s eldest law shall
hold;”—

Ah, there’s the thought which makes his
random line

Dear as refined gold!

Then shall I drink this draught of oxymel,
Part sweet, part sharp? Myself o’er-
prized to know

Is sharp; the cause is sweet, and truth
to tell

Few would that cause forgo,

Which is, that this of all the men on earth
Doth love me well enough to count me
great—

To think my soul and his of equal girth—
O liberal estimate!

And yet it is so; he is bound to me,
For human love makes aliens near of kin;

HONOURS

By it I rise, there is equality:
I rise to thee, my twin.

"Take courage"—courage! ay, my purple
peer,
I will take courage; for thy Tyrian
rays
Refresh me to the heart, and strangely
dear
And healing is thy praise.

"Take courage," quoth he, "and respect
the mind
Your Maker gave, for good your fate
fulfill;
The fate round many hearts your own to
wind."
Twin soul, I will! I will!

PART II

The Answer

As one who, journeying, checks the rein
in haste
Because a chasm doth yawn across his
way
Too wide for leaping, and too steeply
faced
For climber to essay—

HONOURS

As such an one, being brought to sudden
stand,

Doubts all his foregone path if 't were
the true,

And turns to this and then to the other
hand

As knowing not what to do,—

So I, being checked, am with my path
at strife

Which led to such a chasm, and there
doth end.

False path! it cost me priceless years of
life,

My well-beloved friend.

There fell a flute when Ganymede went up—

The flute that he was wont to play
upon:

It dropped beside the jonquil's milk-white
cup,

And freckled cowslips wan—

Dropped from his heedless hand, when,
dazed and mute,

He sailed upon the eagle's quivering
wing,

Aspiring, panting—ay, it dropped—the
flute

Erewhile a cherished thing.

HONOURS

Among the delicate grasses and the
bells

Of crocuses that spotted a rill side,
I picked up such a flute, and its clear
swells

To my young lips replied.

I played thereon, and its response was
sweet;

But lo, they took from me that solacing
reed.

"O shame!" they said; "such music is
not meet;

Go up like Ganymede.

"Go up, despise these humble grassy
things,

Sit on the golden edge of yonder cloud."

Alas! though ne'er for me those eagle
wings

Stooped from their eyrie proud.

My flute! and flung away its echoes
sleep;

But as for me, my life-pulse beateth
low;

And like a last-year's leaf enshrouded
deep

Under the drifting snow,

HONOURS

. Or like some vessel wrecked upon the
sand

Of torrid swamps, with all her mer-
chandise,
And left to rot betwixt the sea and land,
My helpless spirit lies.

Rueing, I think for what then was I
made;

What end appointed for — what use de-
signed?

Now let me right this heart that was
bewrayed—

Unveil these eyes gone blind.

My well-beloved friend, at noon to-day

Over our cliffs a white mist lay un-
furled,

So thick, one standing on their brink
might say,

Lo, here doth end the world.

A white abyss beneath, and nought be-
side;

Yet, hark! a cropping sound not ten
feet down:

Soon I could trace some browsing lambs
that hied

Through rock-paths cleft and brown.

HONOURS

And here and there green tufts of grass
 peered through,
 Salt lavender, and sea thrift; then behold,
The mist, subsiding ever, bared to view
 A beast of giant mould.

She seemed a great sea monster lying
 content
 With all her cubs about her: but deep—
 deep—
The subtle mist went floating; its descent
 Showed the world's end was steep.

It shook, it melted, shaking more, till, lo,
 The sprawling monster was a rock;
 her brood
Were boulders, whereon seamews white
 as snow
 Sat watching for their food.

Then once again it sank, its day was
 done:
 Part rolled away, part vanished utterly,
And glimmering softly under the white sun,
 Behold! a great white sea.

O that the mist which veileth my To-come
 Would so dissolve and yield unto mine
 eyes

HONOURS

A worthy path! I'd count not wearisome
Long toil, nor enterprise,

But strain to reach it; ay, with wrestlings
stout

And hopes that even in the dark will
grow

'Like plants in dungeons, reaching feelers
out),

And ploddings wary and slow.

Is there such path already made to fit
The measure of my foot? It shall atone
For much, if I at length may light on it
And know it for mine own.

But is there none? why, then, 't is more
than well:

And glad at heart myself will hew one
out,

Let me be only sure; for, sooth to tell,
The sorest dole is doubt—

Doubt, a blank twilight of the heart,
which mars

All sweetest colours in its dimness same;
A soul-mist, through whose rifts familiar
stars

Beholding, we misname.

HONOURS

With glosses they obscured God's natural
truth,
And with tradition tarnished His re-
vealed;
With vain protections they endangered
youth,
With layings bare they sealed.

What aileth thee, myself? Alas! thy
hands
Are tired with old opinions—heir and
son,
Thou hast inherited thy father's lands
And all his debts thereon.

O that some power would give me Adam's
eyes!
Or for the straight simplicity of Eve!
For I see nought, or grow, poor fool,
too wise
With seeing to believe.

Exemplars may be heaped until they hide
The rules that they were made to render
plain;
Love may be watched, her nature to de-
cide,
Until love's self doth wane.

HONOURS

Ah me! and when forgotten and foregone
We leave the learning of departed
days,
And cease the generations past to con,
Their wisdom and their ways—

When fain to learn we lean into the
dark,
And grope to feel the floor of the
abyss,
Or find the secret boundary lines which
mark
Where soul and matter kiss--

Fair world! these puzzled souls of ours
grow weak
With beating their bruised wings against
the rim
That bounds their utmost flying, when
they seek
The distant and the dim.

We pant, we strain like birds against
their wires;
Are sick to reach the vast and the
beyond;—
And what avails, if still to our desires
Those far-off gulfs respond?

HONOURS

Contentment comes not therefore; still
there lies

An outer distance when the first is
hailed,

And still for ever yawns before our eyes
An **UTMOST**—that is veiled.

Searching those edges of the universe,
We leave the central fields a fallow
part;

To feed the eye more precious things
amerce,

And starve the darkened heart.

Then all goes wrong: the old foundations
rock;

One scorns at him of old who gazed
unshod;

One striking with a pickaxe thinks the
shock

Shall move the seat of God.

A little way, a very little way
(Life is so short), they dig into the
rind,

And they are very sorry, so they say,—
Sorry for what they find.

But truth is sacred—ay, and must be told:
There is a story long beloved of man;

HONOURS

We must forgo it, for it will not hold—
Nature had no such plan.

And then, "if God had said it", some
should cry,

"We have the story from the fountain-
head:"

Why, then, what better than the old
reply,

The first "Yea, HATH God said?"

The garden, O the garden, must it go,
Source of our hope and our most dear
regret?

The ancient story, must it no more show
How man may win it yet?

And all upon the Titan child's decree,
The baby science, born but yesterday,
That in its rash unlearned infancy
With shells and stones at play,

And delving in the outworks of this
world,

And little crevices that it could reach,
Discovered certain bones laid up, and
furled

Under an ancient beach,

HONOURS

And other waifs that lay to its young
mind

Some fathoms lower than they ought
to lie,

By gain whereof it could not fail to find
Much proof of ancients,

Hints at a pedigree withdrawn and vast,
Terrible deeps, and old obscurities,
Or soulless origin, and twilight passed
In the primeval seas,

Whereof it tells, as thinking it hath been
Of truth not meant for man inheritor;
As if this knowledge Heaven had ne'er
foreseen

And not provided for!

Knowledge ordained to live! although
the fate

Of much that went before it was ---
to die,

And be called ignorance by such as wait
Till the next drift comes by.

O marvellous credulity of man!

If God indeed kept secret, couldst thou
know

Or follow up the mighty Artisan

Unless He willed it so?

HONOURS

And canst thou of the Maker think in
sooth

That of the Made He shall be found
at fault,

And dream of wresting from him hidden
truth

By force or by assault?

But if He keeps not secret—if thine eyes

He openeth to His wondrous work of
late—

Think how in soberness thy wisdom lies,
And have the grace to wait.

Wait, nor against the half-learned lesson
fret,

Nor chide at old belief as if it erred,
Because thou canst not reconcile as yet
The Worker and the word.

Either the Worker did in ancient days
Give us the word, His tale of love and
might;

(And if in truth He gave it us, who says
He did not give it right?)

Or else He gave it not, and then indeed
We know not if He is—by whom our
years

HONOURS

Are portioned, who the orphan moons
doth lead,
And the unfathered spheres.

We sit unowned upon our burial sod,
And know not whence we come or
whose we be,
Comfortless mourners for the mount of
God,
The rocks of Calvary:

Bereft of heaven, and of the long-loved
page
Wrought us by some who thought with
death to cope;
Despairing comforters, from age to age
Sowing the seeds of hope:

Gracious deceivers, who have lifted us
Out of the slough where passed our
unknown youth;
Beneficent liars, who have gifted us
With sacred love of truth!

Farewell to them: yet pause ere thou
unmoor
And set thine ark adrift on unknown
seas;

HONOURS

How wert thou bettered so, or more
secure
Thou, and thy destinies?

And if thou searchest, and art made to
fear
Facing of unread riddles dark and
hard,
And mastering not their majesty austere,
Their meaning locked and barred:

How would it make the weight and
wonder less,
If, lifted from immortal shoulders down,
The worlds were cast on seas of empti-
ness
In realms without a crown,

And (if there were no God) were left
to rue
Dominion of the air and of the fire?
Then if there be a God, "Let God be
true,
And every man a liar."

But as for me, I do not speak as one
That is exempt: I am with life at
feud:

HONOURS

My heart reproacheth me, as there were
none
Of so small gratitude.

Wherewith shall I console thee, heart o'
mine,
And still thy yearning and resolve thy
doubt?
That which I know, and that which I
divine,
Alas! have left thee out.

I have aspired to know the might of God,
As if the story of his love was furled,
Nor sacred foot the grasses e'er had trod
Of this redeemed world:—

Have sunk my thoughts as lead into the
deep,
To grope for that abyss whence evil
grew,
And spirits of ill, with eyes that cannot
weep,
Hungry and desolate flew;

As if their legions did not one day crowd
The death-pangs of the Conquering
Good to see!
As if a sacred head had never bowed
In death for man—for me;

HONOURS

Nor ransomed back the souls beloved,
the sons

Of men, from thralldom with the nether
kings

In that dark country where those evil
ones

Trail their unhallowed wings.

And didst Thou love the race that loved
not Thee,

And didst Thou take to heaven a human
brow?

Dost plead with man's voice by the mar-
vellous sea?

Art Thou his kinsman now?

O God, O kinsman loved, but not enough!

O man, with eyes majestic after death,
Whose feet have toiled along our path-
ways rough,

Whose lips drawn human breath!

By that one likeness which is ours and
Thine,

By that one nature which doth hold us
kin,

By that high heaven where, sinless, Thou
dost shine

To draw us sinners in,

HONOURS

By Thy last silence in the judgment-hall,
By long foreknowledge of the deadly
tree,
By darkness, by the wormwood and the
gall,
I pray Thee visit me.

Come, lest this heart should, cold and
cast away,
Die ere the guest adored she enter-
tain—
Lest eyes which never saw Thine earthly
day
Should miss Thy heavenly reign.

Come weary-eyed from seeking in the
night
Thy wanderers strayed upon the path-
less wold,
Who wounded, dying, cry to Thee for
light,
And cannot find their fold.

And deign, O Watcher, with the sleep-
less brow,
Pathetic in its yearning—deign reply:
Is there, O is there aught that such as
Thou
Wouldst take from such as I?

HONOURS

Are there no briars across Thy pathway
thrust?

Are there no thorns that compass it
about?

Nor any stones that Thou wilt deign to
trust

My hands to gather out?

O, if Thou wilt, and if such bliss
might be,

It were a cure for doubt, regret, delay—
Let my lost pathway go—what aileth
me?—

There is a better way.

What though unmarked the happy work-
man toil,

And break unthanked of man the stub-
born clod?

It is enough, for sacred is the soil,
Dear are the hills of God.

Far better in its place the lowliest bird
Should sing aright to Him the lowliest
song,

Than that a seraph strayed should take
the word

And sing His glory wrong.

HONOURS

Friend, it is time to work. I say to thee,
Thou dost all earthly good by much
excel;

Thou and God's blessing are enough for
me:

My work, my work—farewell !

Requiescat
in Pace!

O my heart, my heart is sick awishing
and awaiting:

The lad took up his knapsack, he went,
he went his way;
And I looked on for his coming, as a
prisoner through the grating
Looks and longs and longs and wishes
for its opening day.

On the wild purple mountains, all alone
with no other,
The strong terrible mountains, he longed,
he longed to be;
And he stooped to kiss his father, and he
stooped to kiss his mother,
And till I said "Adieu, sweet Sir," he
quite forgot me.

He wrote of their white raiment, the ghostly
capas that screen them,
Of the storm winds that beat them, their
thunder-rents and scars,

HONOURS

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capas that screen them,
Of the storm winds that beat them, their
thunder-rents and scars,

REQUIESCAT IN PACE!

And the paradise of purple, and the golden
slopes atween them,
And fields, where grow God's gentian
bells, and His crocus stars.

He wrote of frail gauzy clouds, that drop
on them like fleeces,
And make green their fir forests, and
feed their mosses hoar;
Or come sailing up the valleys, and get
wrecked and go to pieces,
Like sloops against their cruel strength:
then he wrote no more.

O the silence that came next, the patience
and long aching!

They never said so much as "He was
a dear loved son;"
Not the father to the mother moaned, that
dreary stillness breaking:
"Ah! wherefore did he leave us—this,
our only one?"

They sat within, 'as waiting, until the
neighbours prayed them,
At Cromer, by the sea-coast, 't were peace
and change to be;
And to Cromer, in their patience, or that
urgency affrayed them,
Or because the tidings tarried, they
came, and took me.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE!

It was three months and over since the
dear lad had started:

On the green downs at Cromer I sat
to see the view;

On an open space of herbage, where the
ling and fern had parted,
Betwixt the tall white lighthouse towers,
the old and the new.

Below me lay the wide sea, the scarlet
sun was stooping,

And he dyed the waste water, as with
a scarlet dye;

And he dyed the lighthouse towers; every
bird with white wing swooping

Took his colours, and the cliffs did, and
the yawning sky.

Over grass came that strange flush, and
over ling and heather,

Over flocks of sheep and lambs, and
over Cromer town;

And each filmy cloudlet crossing drifted
like a scarlet feather

Torn from the folded wings of clouds,
while he settled down.

When I looked, I dared not sigh:—In the
light of God's splendour,

With his daily blue and gold, who am
I? what am I?

REQUIESCAT IN PACE!

But that passion and outpouring seemed
an awful sign and tender,
Like the blood of the Redeemer, shown
on earth and sky.

O for comfort, O the waste of a long doubt
and trouble!

On that sultry August eve trouble had
me meek;

I was tired of my sorrow—O so faint,
for it was double

In the weight of its oppression, that
I could not speak!

And a little comfort grew, while the
dimmed eyes were feeding,

And the dull ears with murmur of waters
satisfied;

But a dream came slowly nigh me, all my
thoughts and fancy leading

Across the bounds of waking life to
the other side.

And I dreamt that I looked out, to the
waste waters turning,

And saw the flakes of scarlet from wave
to wave tossed on;

And the scarlet mix with azure, where
a heap of gold lay burning

On the clear remote sea reaches; for
the sun was gone.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE!

Then I thought a far-off shout dropped
across the still water—

A question as I took it, for soon an
answer came

From the tall white ruined lighthouse: "If
it be the old man's daughter

That we wot of," ran the answer, "what
then—who's to blame?"

I looked up at the lighthouse all roofless
and storm-broken:

A great white bird sat on it, with neck
stretched out to sea;

Unto somewhat which was sailing in a
skiff the bird had spoken,

And a trembling seized my spirit, for
they talked of me.

I was the old man's daughter, the bird
went on to name him;

"He loved to count the starlings as he
sat in the sun;

Long ago he served with Nelson, and his
story did not shame him:

Ay, the old man was a good man—
and his work was done."

The skiff was like a crescent, ghost of
some moon departed,

Frail, white, she rocked and curtsied
as the red wave she crossed,

REQUIESCAT IN PACE!

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the sun was gone.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE!

I have dreamed as I remember: give me
time—I was reputed
Once to have a steady courage—O, I
fear 'tis gone!"

And I said, "Is this my heart? if it be,
low 'tis beating,
So he lies on the mountain, hard by
the eagles' brood;

I have had a dream this evening, while
the white and gold were fleeting,
But I need not, need not tell it—where
would be the good?

"Where would be the good to them, his
father and his mother?

For the ghost of their dead hope ap-
peareth to them still.

While a lonely watchfire smoulders, who
its dying red would smother,
That gives what little light there is to
a darksome hill?"

I rose up, I made no moan, I did not
cry nor falter,
But slowly in the twilight I came to
Cromer town.

What can wringing of the hands do that
which is ordained to alter?

He had climbed, had climbed the moun-
tain, he would ne'er come down.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE!

But, O my first, O my best, I could not
choose but love thee:

O, to be a wild white bird, and seek
thy rocky bed!

From my breast I'd give thee burial, pluck
the down and spread above thee;

I would sit and sing thy requiem on the
mountain head.

Fare thee well, my love of loves! would
I had died before thee!

O, to be at least a cloud, that near
thee I might flow,

Solemnly approach the mountain, weep
away my being o'er thee,

And veil thy breast with icicles, and
thy brow with snow!

Supper at the Mill

Mother. Well, Frances.

Frances. Well, good mother, how are you?

M. I'm hearty, lass, but warm; the weather's warm:

I think 't is mostly warm on market days. I met with George behind the mill: said he, "Mother, go in and rest awhile."

F. Ay, do,
And stay to supper; put your basket down.

M. Why, now, it is not heavy?

F. Willie, man,
Get up and kiss your Granny. Heavy, no!
Some call good churning luck; but, luck
or skill,

Your butter mostly comes as firm and
sweet

As if 't was Christmas. So you sold it all?

M. All but this pat that I put by for
George;

He always loved my butter.

F. That he did.

SUPPER AT THE MILL

M. And has your speckled hen brought
off her brood?

F. Not yet; but that old duck I told
you of,

She hatched eleven out of twelve to-day.

Child. And, Granny, they're so yellow.

M. Ay, my lad,

Yellow as gold—yellow as Willie's hair.

C. They're all mine, Granny—father
says they're mine.

M. To think of that!

F. Yes, Granny, only think!

Why, father means to sell them when
they're fat,

And put the money in the savings bank,

And all against our Willie goes to school:

But Willie would not touch them—no,
not he;

He knows that father would be angry else.

C. But I want one to play with—O,

I want

A little yellow duck to take to bed!

M. What! would ye rob the poor old
mother, then?

F. Now, Granny, if you'll hold the babe
awhile;

'Tis time I took up Willie to his crib.

[*Exit* FRANCES.]

SUPPER AT THE MILL

[*Mother sings to the infant.*]

Playing on the virginals,
Who but I? Sae glad, sae free,
Smelling for all cordials,
The green mint and marjorie;
Set among the budding broom.
Kingcup and daffodilly,
By my side I made him room:
O love my Willie!

"Like me, love me, girl o' gowd,"
Sang he to my nimble strain;
Sweet his ruddy lips o'erflowed
Till my heartstrings rang again:
By the broom, the bonny broom,
Kingcup and daffodilly,
In my heart I made him room:
O love my Willie!

"Pipe and play, dear heart," sang he.
"I must go, yet pipe and play;
Soon I'll come and ask of thee
For an answer yea or nay;"
And I waited till the flocks
Panted in yon waters stilly,
And the corn stood in the shocks:
O love my Willie!

I thought first when thou didst come
I would wear the ring for thee,

SUPPER AT THE MILL

But the year told out its sum
Ere again thou sat'st by me;
Thou hadst nought to ask that day
By kingcup and daffodilly;
I said neither yea nor nay:
O love my Willie!

Enter GEORGE

G. Well, mother, 'tis a fortnight now,
or more,
Since I set eyes on you.

M. Ay, George, my dear,
I reckon you've been busy: so have we.

G. And how does father?

M. He gets through his work,
But he grows stiff, a little stiff, my dear;
He's not so young, you know, by twenty
years

As I am—not so young by twenty years,
And I'm past sixty.

G. Yet he's hale and stout,
And seems to take a pleasure in his pipe;
And seems to take a pleasure in his cows,
And a pride, too.

M. And well he may, my dear.

G. Give me the little one, he tires your
arm;
He's such a kicking, crowing, wakeful
rogue,

SUPPER AT THE MILL

He almost wears our lives out with his
noise

Just at day-dawning, when we wish to
sleep.

What! you young villain, would you clench
your fist

In father's curls? a dusty father, sure,
And you're as clean as wax.

Ay, you may laugh;
But if you live a seven years more or so,
These hands of yours will all be brown
and scratched

With climbing after nest-eggs. They'll
go down

As many rat-holes as are round the mere;
And you'll love mud, all manner of mud
and dirt,

As your father did afore you, and you'll
wade

After young water-birds; and you'll get
bogged

Setting of eel-traps, and you'll spoil your
clothes,

And come home torn and dripping: then,
you know,

You'll feel the stick—you'll feel the stick,
my lad!

SUPPER AT THE MILL

Enter FRANCES

F. You should not talk so to the blessed
babe—

How can you, George? why, he may be
in heaven

Before the time you tell of.

M. Look at him:

So earnest, such an eager pair of eyes!

He thrives, my dear.

F. Yes, that he does, thank God!

My children are all strong.

M. 'Tis much to say;

Sick children fret their mothers' hearts
to shreds,

And do no credit to their keep nor care.

Where is your little lass?

F. Your daughter came

And begged her of us for a week or so.

M. Well, well, she might be wiser, that
she might,

For she can sit at ease and pay her way;

A sober husband, too—a cheerful man—

Honest as ever stepped, and fond of her;

Yet she is never easy, never glad,

Because she has not children. Well-a-
day!

If she could know how hard her mother
worked,

And what ado I had, and what a moil

SUPPER AT THE MILL

With my half-dozen! Children, ay, for-sooth,

They bring their own love with them
when they come,

But if they come not there is peace and
rest;

The pretty lambs! and yet she cries for
more:

Why, the world's full of them, and so
is heaven—

They are not rare.

G. No, mother, not at all;
But Hannah must not keep our Fanny
long—

She spoils her.

M. Ah! folks spoil their children now;
When I was a young woman 't was not so;
We made our children fear us, made them
work,

Kept them in order.

G. Were not proud of them—
Eh, mother?

M. I set store by mine, 't is true,
But then I had good cause.

G. My lad, d'ye hear?
Your Granny was not proud, by no means
proud!

She never spoilt your father—no, not she,
Nor ever made him sing at harvest-home,
Nor at the forge, nor at the baker's shop,

SUPPER AT THE MILL

Nor to the doctor while she lay abed
Sick, and he crept upstairs to share her
broth.

M. Well, well, you were my youngest,
and, what's more,
Your father loved to hear you sing—he did,
Although, good man, he could not tell
one tune

From the other.

F. No, he got his voice from you:
Do use it, George, and send the child
to sleep.

G. What must I sing?

F. The ballad of the man
That is so shy he cannot speak his mind.

G. Ay, of the purple grapes and crimson
leaves;

But, mother, put your shawl and bonnet
off.

And, Frances, lass, I brought some cresses
in:

Just wash them, toast the bacon, break
some eggs,

And let's to supper shortly.

[Sings.]

My neighbour White—we met to-day—

He always had a cheerful way,

As if he breathed at ease;

My neighbour White lives down the glade,

SUPPER AT THE MILL

Than the red sun that on her cheek
Smiles as he lieth low.

Sometimes the roses by the latch
Or scarlet vine-leaves from her thatch
Come sailing down like birds;
When from their drifts her board I clear,
She thanks me, but I scarce can hear
The shyly uttered words.

Oft have I wooed sweet Lettice White
By daylight and by candlelight
When we two were apart.
Some better day come on apace,
And let me tell her face to face,
"Maiden thou hast my heart."

How gently rock yon poplars high
Against the reach of primrose sky
With heaven's pale candles stored!
She sees them all, sweet Lettice White;
I'll e'en go sit again to-night
Beside her ironing board!

Why, you young rascal! who would think
it now?
No sooner do I stop than you look up.
What would you have your poor old
father do?
'Twas a brave song, long-winded, and
not loud.

SUPPER AT THE MILL

M. He heard the bacon sputter on the
fork,
And heard his mother's step across the
floor.
Where did you get that song?—'tis new
to me.

G. I bought it of a pedlar.

M. Did you so?
Well, you were always for the love-songs,
George.

F. My dear, just lay his head upon
your arm,
And if you'll pace and sing two minutes
more
He needs must sleep—his eyes are full
of sleep.

G. Do you sing, mother.

F. Ay, good mother, do;
'Tis long since we have heard you.

M. Like enough;
I'm an old woman, and the girls and
lads

I used to sing to sleep o'ertop me now.
What should I sing for?

G. Why, to pleasure us.
Sing in the chimney corner, where you
sit,
And I'll pace gently with the little one.

SUPPER AT THE MILL

[*Mother sings.*]

When sparrows build, and the leaves break
forth,

My old sorrow wakes and cries,
For I know there is dawn in the far, far
north,

And a scarlet sun doth rise;
Like a scarlet fleece the snow-field spreads,
And the icy founts run free,
And the bergs begin to bow their heads,
And plunge, and sail in the sea.

O my lost love, and my own, own love,
And my love that loved me so!
Is there never a chink in the world above
Where they listen for words from below?
Nay, I spoke once, and I grieved thee sore,
I remember all that I said,
And now thou wilt hear me no more—no more
Till the sea gives up her dead.

Thou didst set thy foot on the ship, and sail
To the ice-fields and the snow;
Thou wert sad, for thy love did nought avail,
And the end I could not know;
How could I tell I should love thee to-day,
Whom that day I held not dear?
How could I know I should love thee away
When I did not love thee anear?

SUPPER AT THE MILL

We shall walk no more through the sodden
plain

With the faded bents o'erspread,

We shall stand no more by the seething main

While the dark wrack drives o'erhead;

We shall part no more in the wind and the
rain,

Where thy last farewell was said;

But perhaps I shall meet thee and know
thee again

When the sea gives up her dead.

F. Asleep at last, and time he was,
indeed.

Turn back the cradle-quilt, and lay him in;
And, mother, will you please to draw your
chair?—

The supper's ready.

Scholar and Carpenter

While ripening corn grew thick and deep,
And here and there men stood to reap,
One morn I put my heart to sleep,
And to the lanes I took my way.
The goldfinch on a thistle-head
Stood scattering seedlets while she fed;
The wrens their pretty gossip spread,
Or joined a random roundelay.

On hanging cobwebs shone the dew,
And thick the wayside clovers grew;
The feeding bee had much to do,
So fast did honey-drops exude:
She sucked and murmured, and was gone,
And lit on other blooms anon,
The while I learned a lesson on
The source and sense of quietude.

For sheep-bells chiming from a wold,
Or bleat of lamb within its fold,
Or cooing of love-legends old
To dove-wives make not quiet less;

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

Ecstatic chirp of wingèd thing,
Or bubbling of the water-spring,
Are sounds that more than silence bring
Itself and its delightsomeness.

While thus I went to gladness fain,
I had but walked a mile or twain
Before my heart woke up again,
As dreaming she had slept too late;
The morning freshness that she viewed
With her own meanings she endued,
And touched with her solicitude
The natures she did meditate.

"If quiet is, for it I wait;
To it, ah! let me wed my fate,
And, like a sad wife, supplicate
My roving lord no more to flee;
If leisure is—but, ah! 't is not—
'Tis long past praying for, God wot;
The fashion of it men forgot,
About the age of chivalry.

"Sweet is the leisure of the bird;
She craves no time for work deferred;
Her wings are not to aching stirred
Providing for her helpless ones.
Fair is the leisure of the wheat;
All night the damps about it fleet;

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

All day it basketh in the heat,
And grows, and whispers orisons.

"Grand is the leisure of the earth;
She gives her happy myriads birth,
And after harvest fears not dearth,
But goes to sleep in snow-wreaths dim.
Dread is the leisure up above
The while He sits whose name is Love,
And waits, as Noah did, for the dove,
To wit if she would fly to him.

"He waits for us, while, houseless things,
We beat about with bruised wings
On the dark floods and water-springs,
The ruined world, the desolate sea;
With open windows from the prime
All night, all day, He waits sublime,
Until the fullness of the time
Decreed from His eternity.

"Where is OUR leisure?—Give us rest.
Where is the quiet we possessed?
We must have had it once—were blest
With peace whose phantoms yet entice.
Sorely the mother of mankind
Longed for the garden left behind;
For we still prove some yearnings blind
Inherited from Paradise."

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

"Hold, heart!" I cried; "for trouble
sleeps;

I hear no sound of aught that weeps;

I will not look into thy deeps—

I am afraid, I am afraid!"

"Afraid!" she saith; "and yet 'tis true
That what man dreads he still should
view—

Should do the thing he fears to do,
And storm the ghosts in ambuscade."

"What good?" I sigh. "Was reason
meant

To straighten branches that are bent,
Or soothe an ancient discontent,

The instinct of a race dethroned?

Ah! doubly should that instinct go

Must the four rivers cease to flow,

Nor yield those rumours sweet and low

Wherewith man's life is undertoned."

"Yet had I but the past," she cries,

"And it was lost, I would arise

And comfort me some other wise.

But more than loss about me clings:

I am but restless with my race;

The whispers from a heavenly place,

Once dropped among us, seem to chase

Rest with their prophet-visittings.

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

"The race is like a child, as yet
Too young for all things to be set
Plainly before him with no let
Or hindrance meet for his degree;
But ne'ertheless by much too old
Not to perceive that men withhold
More of the story than is told,
And so infer a mystery.

"If the Celestials daily fly
With messages on missions high,
And float, our masts and turrets nigh,
Conversing on Heaven's great intents;
What wonder hints of coming things,
Whereto man's hope and yearning clings,
Should drop like feathers from their wings
And give us vague presentiments?

"And as the waxing moon can take
The tidal waters in her wake
And lead them round and round to break
Obedient to her drawings dim;
So may the movements of His mind,
The first Great Father of mankind,
Affect with answering movements blind,
And draw the souls that breathe by Him.

"We had a message long ago
That like a river peace should flow,

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

And Eden bloom again below.

We heard, and we began to wait:
Full soon that message men forgot;
Yet waiting is their destined lot,
And waiting for they know not what
They strive with yearnings passionate.

"Regret and faith alike enchain;
There was a loss, there comes a gain;
We stand at fault betwixt the twain,
And that is veiled for which we pant.
Our lives are short, our ten times seven;
We think the councils held in heaven
Sit long, ere yet that blissful leaven
Work peace amongst the militant.

"Then we blame God that sin should be:
Adam began it at the tree;
'The woman whom THOU gavest me;'
And we adopt his dark device.
O long Thou tarriest! come and reign,
And bring forgiveness in Thy train,
And give us in our hands again
The apples of Thy Paradise."

"Far-seeing heart! if that be all,
The happy things that did not fall,"
I sighed, "from every coppice call.
They never from that garden went.

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

Behold their joy, so comfort thee,
Behold the blossom and the bee,
For they are yet as good and free
As when poor Eve was innocent.

"But reason thus: 'If we sank low,
If the lost garden we forgo,
Each in his day, nor ever know
But in our poet souls its face;
Yet we may rise until we reach
A height untold of in its speech—
A lesson that it could not teach
Learn in this darker dwelling-place.'

"And reason on: 'We take the spoil;
Loss made us poets, and the soil
Taught us great patience in our toil,
And life is kin to God through death.
Christ were not One with us but so,
And if bereft of Him we go;
Dearer the heavenly mansions grow,
His home, to man that wandereth.'

"Content thee so, and ease thy smart."
With that she slept again, my heart,
And I admired and took my part
With crowds of happy things the while:
With open velvet butterflies
That swung and spread their peacock eyes

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

As if they cared no more to rise
From off their beds of camomile.

The blackcaps in an orchard met,
Praising the berries while they ate:
The finch that flew her beak to whet
Before she joined them on the tree;
The water mouse among the reeds—
His bright eyes glancing black as beads,
So happy with a bunch of seeds—
I felt their gladness heartily.

But I came on, I smelt the hay,
And up the hills I took my way,
And down them still made holiday,
And walked, and wearied not a whit;
But ever with the lane I went
Until it dropped with steep descent,
Cut deep into the rock, a tent
Of maple branches roofing it.

Adown the rock small runlets wept,
And reckless ivies leaned and crept,
And little spots of sunshine slept
On its brown steeps and made them fair;
And broader beams athwart it shot,
Where martins cheeped in many a knot,
For they had ta'en a sandy plot
And scooped another Petra there.

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

And deeper down, hemmed in and hid
From upper light and life amid
The swallows gossiping, I thrid
Its mazes, till the dipping land
Sank to the level of my lane:
That was the last hill of the chain,
And fair below I saw the plain
That seemed cold cheer to reprimand.

Half-drowned in sleepy peace it lay,
As satiate with the boundless play
Of sunshine on its green array.
And clear-cut hills of gloomy blue
To keep it safe rose up behind,
As with a charmed ring to bind
The grassy sea, where clouds might find
A place to bring their shadows to.

I said, and blest that pastoral grace,
"How sweet thou art, thou sunny place!
Thy God approves thy smiling face:"
But straight my heart put in her word;
She said, "Albeit thy face I bless,
There have been times, sweet wilderness,
When I have wished to love thee less,
Such pangs thy smile administered."

But, lo! I reached a field of wheat,
And by its gate full clear and sweet

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

A workman sang, while at his feet
Played a young child, all life and stir—
A three years' child, with rosy lip,
Who in the song had partnership,
Made happy with each falling chip
Dropped by the busy carpenter.

This, reared a new gate for the old,
And loud the tuneful measure rolled,
But stopped as I came up to hold
Some kindly talk of passing things.
Brave were his eyes, and frank his mien;
Of all men's faces, calm or keen,
A better I have never seen
In all my lonely wanderings.

And how it was I scarce can tell,
We seemed to please each other well;
I lingered till a noonday bell
Had sounded, and his task was done.
An oak had screened us from the heat;
And 'neath it in the standing wheat,
A cradle and a fair retreat,
Full sweetly slept the little one.

The workman rested from his stroke,
And manly were the words he spoke,
Until the smiling babe awoke
And prayed to him for milk and food.

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

Then to a runlet forth he went,
And brought a wallet from the bent,
And bade me to the meal, intent
I should not quit his neighbourhood.

"For here," said he, "are bread and beer,
And meat enough to make good cheer;
Sir, eat with me, and have no fear,
For none upon my work depend,
Saving this child; and I may say
That I am rich, for every day
I put by somewhat; therefore stay,
And to such eating condescend."

We ate. The child—child fair to see—
Began to cling about his knee,
And he down leaning fatherly
Received some softly-prattled prayer;
He smiled as if to list were balm,
And with his labour-hardened palm
Pushed from the baby-forehead calm
Those shining locks that clustered there.

The rosy mouth made fresh essay—
"O would he sing, or would he play?"
I looked, my thought would make its
way—

"Fair is your child of face and limb,
The round blue eyes full sweetly shine."
He answered me with glance benign—

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

"Ay, Sir; but he is none of mine,
Although I set great store by him."

With that, as if his heart was fain
To open—nathless not complain—
He let my quiet questions gain

His story: "Not of kin to me,"
Repeating; "but asleep, awake,
For worse, for better, him I take,
To cherish for my dead wife's sake,
And count him as her legacy.

"I married with the sweetest lass
That ever stepped on meadow grass;
That ever at her looking-glass
Some pleasure took, some natural care;
That ever swept a cottage floor
And worked all day, nor e'er gave o'er
Till eve, then watched beside the door
Till her good man should meet her there.

"But I lost all in its fresh prime;
My wife fell ill before her time—
Just as the bells began to chime
One Sunday morn. By next day's light
Her little babe was born and dead,
And she, unconscious what she said,
With feeble hands about her spread,
Sought it with yearnings infinite.

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

"With mother-longing still beguiled,
And lost in fever-fancies wild,
She piteously bemoaned her child
That we had stolen, she said, away.
And ten sad days she sighed to me,
'I cannot rest until I see
My pretty one! I think that he
Smiled in my face but yesterday.'

"Then she would change, and faintly try
To sing some tender lullaby;
And 'Ah!' would moan, 'if I should die,
Who, sweetest babe, would cherish thee?'
Then weep, 'My pretty boy is grown;
With tender feet on the cold stone
He stands, for he can stand alone,
And no one leads him motherly.'

"Then she with dying movements slow
Would seem to knit, or seem to sew:
'His feet are bare, he must not go
Unshod:' and as her death drew on,
'O little baby,' she would sigh;
'My little child, I cannot die
Till I have you to slumber nigh—
You, you to set mine eyes upon.'

"When she spake thus, and moaning lay,
They said, 'She cannot pass away,

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

So sore she longs: and as the day
Broke on the hills, I left her side.
Mourning along this lane I went;
Some travelling folk had pitched their tent
Up yonder: there a woman, bent
With age, sat meanly canopied.

"A twelvemonths' child was at her side:
'Whose infant may that be?' I cried.
'His that will own him,' she replied;
'His mother's dead, no worse could be.'
'Since you can give—or else I erred—
See, you are taken at your word,'
Quoth I; 'that child is mine; I heard,
And own him! Rise, and give him me.'

"She rose amazed, but cursed me too;
She could not hold such luck for true,
But gave him soon, with small ado.
I laid him by my Lucy's side:
Close to her face that baby crept
And stroked it, and the sweet soul wept;
Then, while upon her arm he slept,
She passed, for she was satisfied.

"I loved her well, I wept her sore,
And when her funeral left my door
I thought that I should never more
Feel any pleasure near me glow;

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

But I have learned, though this I had,
'Tis sometimes natural to be glad,
And no man can be always sad
Unless he wills to have it so.

"Oh, I had heavy nights at first,
And daily wakening was the worst:
For then my grief arose, and burst
Like something fresh upon my head;
Yet when less keen it seemed to grow,
I was not pleased—I wished to go
Mourning adown this vale of woe,
For all my life uncomforted.

"I grudged myself the lightsome air,
That makes man cheerful unaware;
When comfort came, I did not care
To take it in, to feel it stir:
And yet God took with me His plan,
And now for my appointed span
I think I am a happier man
For having wed and wept for her.

"Because no natural tie remains,
On this small thing I spend my gains;
God makes me love him for my pains,
And binds me so to wholesome care:
I would not lose from my past life
That happy year, that happy wife!

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER

Yet now I wage no useless strife
With feelings blithe and debonair.

"I have the courage to be gay,
Although she lieth lapped away
Under the daisies, for I say,
'Thou wouldst be glad if thou couldst
see:'

My constant thought makes manifest
I have not what I love the best,
But I must thank God for the rest
While I hold heaven a verity."

He rose, upon his shoulder set
The child, and while with vague regret
We parted, pleased that we had met,
My heart did with herself confer;
With wholesome shame she did repent
Her reasonings idly eloquent,
And said, "I might be more content:
But God go with the carpenter."

The Star's Monument

IN THE CONCLUDING PART
OF A DISCOURSE ON FAME

He thinks

If there be memory in the world to come,
If thought recur to SOME THINGS
silenced here,
Then shall the deep heart be no longer
dumb,
But find expression in that happier
sphere;
It shall not be denied their utmost sum
Of love, to speak without or fault or
fear,
But utter to the harp with changes sweet
Words that, forbidden still, then heaven
were incomplete.

He speaks

Now let us talk about the ancient days,
And things which happened long before
our birth:

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

It is a pity to lament that praise
Should be no shadow in the train of
worth.

What is it, Madam, that your heart dis-
mayes?

Why murmur at the course of this vast
earth?

Think rather of the work than of the
praise;

Come, we will talk about the ancient
days.

There was a Poet, Madam, once (said
he);

I will relate his story to you now,
While through the branches of this apple-
tree

Some spots of sunshine flicker on your
brow;

While every flower hath on its breast a
bee,

And every bird in stirring doth endow
The grass with falling blooms that
smoothly glide,

As ships drop down a river with the tide.

For telling of his tale no fitter place
Than this old orchard, sloping to the
west;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Through its pink dome of blossom I can
trace

Some overlying azure; for the rest,
These flowery branches round us inter-
lace;

The ground is hollowed like a mossy
nest:

Who talks of fame, while the religious
spring

Offers the incense of her blossoming?

There was a Poet, Madam, once (said
he),

Who, while he walked at sundown in
a lane,

Took to his heart the hope that destiny
Had singled him this guerdon to ob-
tain,

That by the power of his sweet min-
strelsy

Some hearts for truth and goodness he
should gain,

And charm some grovellers to uplift their
eyes

And suddenly wax conscious of the skies.

"Master, good e'en to ye!" a woodman
said,

Who the low hedge was trimming with
his shears.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

"This hour is fine"—the Poet bowed his head.

"More fine," he thought, "O friend! to me appears

The sunset than to you; finer the spread
Of orange lustre through these azure
spheres,

Where little clouds lie still, like flocks of
sheep,

Or vessels sailing in God's other deep.

"O finer far! What work so high as
mine,

Interpreter betwixt the world and man,
Nature's ungathered pearls to set and
shrine;

The mystery she wraps her in to scan;
Her unsyllabic voices to combine,

And serve her with such love as poets
can;

With mortal words, her chant of praise
to bind,

Then die, and leave the poem to mankind?

"O fair, O fine, O lot to be desired!

Early and late my heart appeals to me,
And says, 'O work, O will—Thou man,
be fired

To earn this lot,'—she says, 'I would
not be

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

A worker for mine OWN bread, or one
hired
For mine OWN profit. O, I would be
free
To work for others; love so earned of
them
Should be my wages and my diadem.

“ ‘Then when I died I should not fall,’
says she,
‘Like dropping flowers that no man
noticeth,
But like a great branch of some stately
tree
Rent in a tempest, and flung down to
death,
Thick with green leafage—so that pite-
ously
Each passer by that ruin shuddereth,
And saith, The gap this branch hath left
is wide;
The loss thereof can never be supplied.’ ”

But, Madam, while the Poet pondered so,
Toward the leafy hedge he turned his
eye,
And saw two slender branches that did
grow,
And from it rising spring and flourish
high:

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Their tops were twined together fast, and,
lo,

Their shadow crossed the path as he
went by—

The shadow of a wild rose and a briar,
And it was shaped in semblance like a
lyre.

In sooth, a lyre! and as the soft air
played,

Those branches stirred, but did not
disunite.

"O emblem meet for me!" the Poet
said;

"Ay, I accept and own thee for my
right;

The shadowy lyre across my feet is laid,
Distinct though frail, and clear with
crimson light;

Fast is it twined to bear the windy strain,
And, supple, it will bend and rise again.

"This lyre is cast across the dusty way,
The common path that common men
pursue;

I crave like blessing for my shadowy lay,
Life's trodden paths with beauty to re-
new,

And cheer the eve of many a toil-stained
day.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Light it, old sun, wet it, thou common
dew,
That 'neath men's feet its image still
may be
While yet it waves above them, living
lyre, like thee!"

But even as the Poet spoke, behold
He lifted up his face toward the sky;
The ruddy sun dipt under the grey wold,
His shadowy lyre was gone; and, passing
by,
The woodman lifting up his shears, was
bold
Their temper on those branches twain
to try,
And all their loveliness and leafage sweet
Fell in the pathway, at the Poet's feet.

"Ah! my fair emblem that I chose,"
quoth he,
"That for myself I coveted but now,
Too soon, methinks, thou hast been false
to me;
The lyre from pathway fades, the light
from brow."
Then straightway turned he from it
hastily,
As dream that waking sense will dis-
allow;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

And while the highway heavenward paled
apace,
He went on westward to his dwelling-
place.

He went on steadily, while far and fast
The summer darkness dropped upon
the world,
A gentle air among the cloudlets passed
And fanned away their crimson; then
it curled
The yellow poppies in the field, and
cast
A dimness on the grasses, for it furled
Their daisies, and swept out the purple
stain
That eve had left upon the pastoral plain.

He reached his city. Lo! the darkened
street
Where he abode was full of gazing
crowds;
He heard the muffled tread of many
feet;
A multitude stood gazing at the clouds.
"What mark ye there," said he, "and
wherefore meet?
Only a passing mist the heaven o'er-
shrouds;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

It breaks, it parts, it drifts like scattered
spars—
What lies behind it but the nightly
stars?"

Then did the gazing crowd to him
aver

They sought a lamp in heaven whose
light was hid;

For that in sooth an old Astronomer

Down from his roof had rushed into
their mid,

Frighted, and fain with others to confer,
That he had cried, "O sirs!"—and
upward bid

Them gaze—"O sirs, a light is quenched
afar;

Look up, my masters, we have lost a
star!"

The people pointed, and the Poet's eyes
Flew upward, where a gleaming sister-
hood

Swam in the dewy heaven. The very
skies

Were mutable; for all-amazed he stood
To see that truly not in any wise

He could behold them as of old, nor
could

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

His eyes receive the whole whereof he
wot,
But when he told them over, one WAS
NOT.

While yet he gazed and pondered reverently,

The fickle folk began to move away.

"It is but one star less for us to see,
And what does one star signify?" quoth they;

"The heavens are full of them." "But, ah!" said he,

"That star was bright while yet she lasted." "Ay!"

They answered: "praise her, Poet, an' ye will:

Some are now shining that are brighter still."

"Poor star! to be disparagèd so soon
On her withdrawal," thus the Poet sighed;

"That men should miss, and straight deny her noon

Its brightness!" But the people in their pride

Said, "How are we beholden? 't was no boon

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

She gave. Her nature 't was to shine
so wide:
She could not choose but shine, nor could
we know
Such star had ever dwelt in heaven but
so."

The Poet answered sadly, "That is
true!"

And then he thought upon unthankful-
ness;
While some went homeward; and the
residue,
Reflecting that the stars are number-
less,
Mourned that man's daylight hours should
be so few,
So short the shining that his path may
bless:
To nearer themes then tuned their will-
ing lips,
And thought no more upon the star's
eclipse.

But he, the Poet, could not rest content
Till he had found that old Astronomer;
Therefore at midnight to his house he
went
And prayed him be his tale's inter-
preter.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

And yet upon the heaven his eyes he
bent,
Hearing the marvel; yet he sought for
her
That was awanting, in the hope her face
Once more might fill its reft abiding-
place.

Then said the old Astronomer: "My
son,
I sat alone upon my roof to-night;
I saw the stars come forth, and scarcely
shun
To fringe the edges of the western
light;
I marked those ancient clusters one by
one,
The same that blessed our old fore-
fathers' sight:
For God alone is older—none but He
Can charge the stars with mutability:

"The elders of the night, the steadfast
stars,
The old, old stars which God has let
us see,
That they might be our soul's auxiliars,
And help us to the truth how young
we be—

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

God's youngest, latest born, as if, some
spars
And a little clay being over of them—
He
Had made our world and us thereof,
yet given,
To humble us, the sight of His great
heaven.

“But ah! my son, to-night mine eyes
have seen
The death of light, the end of old re-
nown;
A shrinking back of glory that had been,
A dread eclipse before the Eternal's
frown.
How soon a little grass will grow
between
These eyes and those appointed to look
down
Upon a world that was not made on
high
Till the last scenes of their long empire!

“To-night that shining cluster now de-
spoiled
Lay in day's wake a perfect sister-
hood;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Sweet was its light to me that long had
toiled,

It gleamed and trembled o'er the distant
wood;

Blown in a pile the clouds from it re-
coiled,

Cool twilight up the sky her way made
good;

I saw, but not believed—it was so strange—
That one of those same stars had suffered
change.

“The darkness gathered, and methought
she spread,

Wrapped in a reddish haze that waxed
and waned;

But notwithstanding to myself I said—

‘The stars are changeless; sure some
mote hath stained

Mine eyes, and her fair glory minished.’

Of age and failing vision I complained,
And thought ‘some vapour in the heavens
doth swim,

That makes her look so large and yet so
‘dim.’

“But I gazed round, and all her lustrous
peers

In her red presence showed but wan
and white;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

For like a living coal beheld through
tears,
She glowed and quivered with a gloomy
light:
Methought she trembled, as all sick
through fears,
Helpless, appalled, appealing to the
night;
Like one who throws his arms up to the
sky
And bows down suffering, hopeless of
reply.

“At length, as if an everlasting Hand
Had taken hold upon her in her place,
And swiftly, like a golden grain of sand,
Through all the deep infinitudes of
space
Was drawing her—God’s truth as here I
stand—
Backward and inward to itself; her
face
Fast lessened, lessened, till it looked no
more
Than smallest atom on a boundless shore.

“And she that was so fair, I saw her lie,
The smallest thing in God’s great
firmament,

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Till night was at the darkest, and on
high

Her sisters glittered, though her light
was spent;

I strained, to follow her, each aching
eye,

So swiftly at her Maker's will she
went;

I looked again—I looked—the star was
gone,

And nothing marked in heaven where
she had shone."

"Gone!" said the Poet, "and about to
be

Forgotten: O, how sad a fate is hers!"

"How is it sad, my son?" all reverently
The old man answered; "though she
ministers

No longer with her lamp to me and
thee,

She has fulfilled her mission. God
transfers

Or dims her ray; yet was she blest as
bright,

For all her life was spent in giving light."

"Her mission she fulfilled assuredly,"

The Poet cried: "but, O unhappy star!

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

None praise and few will bear in
memory

The name she went by. O, from far,
from far

Comes down, methinks, her mournful
voice to me.

Full of regrets that men so thankless
are."

So said, he told that old Astronomer
All that the gazing crowd had said of
her.

And he went on to speak in bitter wise,
As one who seems to tell another's
fate,

But feels that nearer meaning underlies,
And points its sadness to his own
estate:

"If such be the reward," he said with
sighs,

"Envy to earn for love, for goodness
hate—

If such be thy reward, hard case is thine!
It had been better for thee not to shine.

"If to reflect a light that is divine
Makes that which doth reflect it better
seen,

And if to see is to condemn the shrine,
'Twere surely better it had never been

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

It had been better for her NOT TO SHINE,
And for me NOT TO SING. Better, I ween,
For us to yield no more that radiance
bright,
For them, to lack the light than scorn
the light."

Strange words were those from Poet lips
(said he);

And then he paused, and sighed, and
turned to look

Upon the lady's downcast eyes, and see
How fast the honey bees in settling
shook

Those apple blossoms on her from the
tree;

He watched her busy fingers as they
took

And slipped the knotted thread, and
thought how much

He would have given that hand to hold
—to touch.

At length, as suddenly become aware

Of this long pause, she lifted up her
face,

And he withdrew his eyes—she looked so
fair

And cold, he thought, in her uncon-
scious grace.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

"Ah! little dreams she of the restless
care,"

He thought, "that makes my heart to
throb apace :

Though we this morning part, the know-
ledge sends

No thrill to her calm pulse—we are but
FRIENDS."

Ah! turret clock (he thought), I would
thy hand

Were hid behind yon towering maple-
trees!

Ah! tell-tale shadow, but one moment
stand—

Dark shadow—fast advancing to my
knees;

Ah! foolish heart (he thought), that vainly
planned

By feigning gladness to arrive at ease;

Ah! painful hour, yet pain to think it
ends;

I must remember that we are but friends.

And while the knotted thread moved to
and fro,

In sweet regretful tones that lady said:

"It seemeth that the fame you would
forgo

The Poet whom you tell of coveted;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

But I would fain, methinks, his story
know.

And was he loved?" said she, "or was
he wed?

And had he friends?" "One friend, per-
haps," said he,

"But for the rest, I pray you let it be."

Ah! little bird (he thought), most patient
bird,

Breasting thy speckled eggs the long
day through,

By so much as my reason is preferred
Above thine instinct, I my work would
do

Better than thou dost thine. Thou hast
not stirred

This hour thy wing. Ah! russet bird,
I sue

For a like patience to wear through these
hours—

Bird on thy nest among the apple flowers.

I will not speak—I will not speak to
thee,

My star! and soon to be my lost, lost
star.

The sweetest, first, that ever shone on me,
So high above me and beyond so far;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

I can forgo thee, but not bear to see
My love, like rising mist, thy lustre
mar:

That were a base return for thy sweet
light.

Shine, though I never more shall see
that thou art bright.

Never! 'Tis certain that no hope is—
none!

No hope for me, and yet for thee no
fear.

The hardest part of my hard task is done;
Thy calm assures me that I am not
dear;

Though far and fast the rapid moments
run,

Thy bosom heaveth not, thine eyes are
clear;

Silent, perhaps a little sad at heart
She is. I am her friend, and I depart.

Silent she had been, but she raised her
face;

"And will you end," said she, "this
half-told tale?"

"Yes, it were best," he answered her.

"The place

Where I left off was where he felt to
fail

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

His courage, Madam, through the fancy
base

That they who love, endure, or work,
may rail

And cease—if all their love, the works
they wrought,

And their endurance, men have set at
nought.

“‘It had been better for me NOT to sing,’
My Poet said, ‘and for her NOT to
shine;’

But him the old man answered, sorrowing,
‘My son, did God who made her, the
Divine

Lighter of suns, when down to yon bright
ring

He cast her, like some gleaming alman-
dine,

And set her in her place, begirt with rays,
Say unto her ‘Give light,’ or say ‘Earn
praise’?”

“The Poet said, ‘He made her to give
light.’

‘My son,’ the old man answered,
‘blest are such;

A blessed lot is theirs; but if each night
Mankind had praised her radiance—in-
asmuch

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

As praise had never made it wax more
bright,

And cannot now rekindle with its touch
Her lost effulgence, it is nought. I wot
That praise was not her blessing nor her
lot.'

“‘Ay,’ said the Poet, ‘I my words abjure,
And I repent me that I uttered them;
But by her light and by its forfeiture
She shall not pass without her requiem.
Though my name perish, yet shall hers
endure

Though I should be forgotten, she, lost
gem,
Shall be remembered; though she sought
not fame,
It shall be busy with her beauteous name.

“‘For I will raise in her bright memory,
Lost now on earth, a lasting monu-
ment,
And graven on it shall recorded be
That all her rays to light mankind
were spent;
And I will sing albeit none heedeth me,
On her exemplar being still intent:
While in men’s sight shall stand the re-
cord thus—
‘So long as she did last she lighted us’.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

"So said, he raised, according to his vow,
On the green grass, where oft his
townsfolk met,
Under the shadow of a leafy bough
That leaned toward a singing rivulet,
One pure white stone, whereon, like
crown on brow,
The image of the vanished star was
set;
And this was graven on the pure white
stone
In golden letters—'WHILE SHE LIVED SHE
SHONE'.

"Madam, I cannot give this story well—
My heart is beating to another chime;
My voice must needs a different cadence
swell;
It is yon singing bird, which all the
time
Wooeth his nested mate, that doth dispel
My thoughts. What, deem you, could
a lover's rhyme
The sweetness of that passionate lay
excel?"
O soft, O low her voice—"I cannot tell."

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

He thinks

The old man—aye he spoke, he was not
hard;

“She was his joy,” he said, “his comfort,
forter,

But he would trust me. I was not de-
barred

Whate’er my heart approved to say to
her.”

Approved! O torn and tempted and ill-
red

And my heart, approve not nor
demur,

It is the serpent that smilith thee

With “God doth know” this
apple-tree.

Yea, God DOTH know, and only God doth
know.

Have pity, God, my spirit groans to
Thee!

I bear thy curse primeval, and I go;

But heavier than on Adam falls on
me

My tillage of the wilderness; for lo,

I leave behind the woman, and I see

As ’t were the gates of Eden closing o’er
To hide her from my sight for evermore.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

He speaks

I am a fool, with sudden start he cried,
To let the song-bird work me such unrest:

If I break off again, I pray you chide,
For morning fleeteth, with my tale at best

Half told. That white stone, Madam,
gleamed beside

The little rivulet, and all men pressed
To read the lost one's story traced thereon,
The golden legend—"While she lived she
shone".

And, Madam, when the Poet heard them
read,

And children spell the letters softly
through,

It may be that he felt at heart some
need,

Some craving to be thus remembered
too;

It may be that he wondered if indeed

He must die wholly when he passed
from view;

It may be, wished when death his eyes
made dim,

That some kind hand would raise such
stone for him.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

He taught them, and they learned, but
not the less

Remained unconscious whence that lore
they drew,

But dreamed that of their native nobleness
Some lofty thoughts that he had
planted, grew;

His glorious maxims in a lowly dress
Like seed sown broadcast sprung in all
men's view,

The sower, passing onward, was not
known,

And all men reaped the harvest as their own.

It may be, Madam, that those ballads
sweet,

Whose rhythmic measures yesterday we
sung,

Which time and changes make not obso-
lete,

But (as a river bears down blossoms
flung

Upon its breast) take with them while
they fleet—

It may be from his lyre that first they
sprung;

But who can tell, since work surviveth
fame?—

The rhyme is left, but lost the Poet's
name.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

He worked, and bravely he fulfilled his
trust—

So long he wandered sowing worthy
seed,

Watering of wayside buds that were adust,
And touching for the common ear his
reed—

So long to wear away the cankering rust
That dulls the gold of life—so long to
plead

With sweetest music for all souls op-
pressed,

That he was old ere he had thought of
rest.

Old and grey-headed, leaning on a staff,
To that great city of his birth he came,
And at its gates he paused with wonder-
ing laugh

To think how changed were all his
thoughts of fame

Since first he carved the golden epitaph

To keep in memory a worthy name,
And thought forgetfulness had been its
doom

But for a few bright letters on a tomb.

The old Astronomer had long since died;
The friends of youth were gone and far
dispersed ;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Strange were the domes that rose on
every side;

Strange fountains on his wondering
vision burst;

The men of yesterday their business plied;
No face was left that he had known at
first;

And in the city gardens, lo, he sees
The saplings that he set are stately trees.

Upon the grass beneath their welcome
shade,

Behold! he marks the fair white monu-
ment,

And on its face the golden words dis-
played,

For sixty years their lustre have not
spent;

He sitteth by it and is not afraid,

But in its shadow he is well content;

And envies not, though bright their gleam-
ings are,

The golden letters of the vanished star.

He gazeth up; exceeding bright appears

That golden legend to his aged eyes,

For they are dazzled till they fill with
tears,

And his lost Youth doth like a vision
rise;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

She saith to him, "In all these toilsome
years,

What hast thou won by work or enter-
prise?

What hast thou won to make amends to
thee,

As thou didst swear to do, for loss of me?

"O man! O white-haired man!" the
vision said,

"Since we two sat beside this monu-
ment

Life's clearest hues are all evanished,

The golden wealth thou hadst of me is
spent;

The wind hath swept thy flowers, their
leaves are shed;

The music is played out that with thee
went."

"Peace, peace!" he cried; "I lost thee,
but, in truth,

There are worse losses than the loss of
youth."

He said not what those losses were—
but I—

But I must leave them, for the time
draws near.

Some lose not ONLY joy, but memory

Of how it felt: not love that was so dear

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Lose only, but the steadfast certainty
That once they had it; doubt comes on,
then fear,
And after that despondency. I wis
The Poet must have meant such loss as
this.

But while he sat and pondered on his
youth,
He said, "It did one deed that doth
remain,
For it preserved the memory and the truth
Of her that now doth neither set nor
wane,
But shine in all men's thoughts; nor sink
forsooth,
And be forgotten like the summer rain.
O, it is good that man should not for-
get
Or benefits foregone or brightness set!"

He spoke and said, "My lot contenteth
me;
I am right glad for this her worthy
fame;
That which was good and great I fain
would see
Drawn with a halo round what rests—
its name."

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

This while the Poet said, behold there
came

A workman with his tools anear the tree,
And when he read the words he paused
awhile

And pondered on them with a wondering
smile.

And then he said, "I pray you, Sir, what
mean

The golden letters of this monument?"
I wonder quoth the Poet, "Hast thou been
A dweller near at hand, and their intent
Hast neither heard by voice of fame, nor
seen

The marble earlier?" "Ay," said he,
and leant

Upon his spade to hear the tale, then sigh,
And say it was a marvel, and pass by.

Then said the Poet, "This is strange to
me."

But as he mused, with trouble in his
mind,
A band of maids approached him leisurely,
Like vessels sailing with a favouring
wind;

And of their rosy lips requested he,
As one that for a doubt would solving
find,

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

The tale, if tale there were, of that white
stone,
And those fair letters—"While she lived
she shone".

Then like a fleet that floats becalmed
they stay.

"O, Sir," saith one, "this monument
is old;

But we have heard our virtuous mothers say
That by their mothers thus the tale
was told:

A Poet made it; journeying then away,
He left us; and though some the mean-
ing hold

For other than the ancient one, yet we
Receive this legend for a certainty:—

"There was a lily once, most purely white,
Beneath the shadow of these boughs it
grew;

Its starry blossom it unclosed by night,
And a young Poet loved its shape and
hue.

He watched it nightly, 't was so fair a
sight,

Until a stormy wind arose and blew,
And when he came once more his flower
to greet,

Its fallen petals drifted to his feet.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

"And for his beautiful white lily's sake,
That she might be remembered where
her scent

Had been right sweet, he said that he
would make

In her dear memory a monument:
For she was purer than a driven flake
Of snow, and in her grace most excel-
lent;

The loveliest life that death did ever mar,
As beautiful to gaze on as a star."

"I thank you, maid," the Poet answered
her,

"And I am glad that I have heard
your tale."

With that they passed; and as an inlander,
Having heard breakers raging in a gale,
And falling down in thunder, will aver
That still, when far away in grassy
vale,

He seems to hear those seething waters
bound,

So in his ears the maiden's voice did
sound.

He leaned his face upon his hand, and
thought

And thought, until a youth came by
that way;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

And once again of him the Poet sought
The story of the star. But, well-a-day!
He said, "The meaning with much doubt
is fraught,
The sense thereof can no man surely
say;
For still tradition sways the common ear,
That of a truth a star DID DISAPPEAR.

"But they who look beneath the outer
shell
That wraps the 'kernel of the people's
lore',
Hold THAT for superstition; and they tell
That seven lovely sisters dwelt of yore
In this old city, where it so befell
That one a Poet loved; that, further-
more,
As stars above us she was pure and good,
And fairest of that beauteous sisterhood.

"So beautiful they were, those virgins
seven,
That all men called them clustered
stars in song,
Forgetful that the stars abide in heaven:
But woman bideth not beneath it long;
For O, alas! alas! one fated even,
When stars their azure deeps began to
throng,

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

That virgin's eyes of Poet loved waxed
dim,
And all their lustrous shining warred to
him.

"In summer dusk she drooped her head
and sighed
Until what time the evening star went
down,
And all the other stars did shining bide
Clear in the lustre of their old renown,
And then—the virgin laid her down and
died:

Forgot her youth, forgot her beauty's
crown,
Forgot the sisters whom she loved before,
And broke her Poet's heart for evermore."

"A mournful tale, in sooth," the lady
saith:

"But did he truly grieve for evermore?"

"It may be you forget," he answereth,

"That this is but a fable at the core
O' the other fable." "Though it be but
breath,"

She asketh, "was it true?" Then he,

"This lore,

Since it is fable, either way may go;
Then, if it please you, think it might be
so."

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

"Nay, but," she saith, "if I had told
your tale,

The virgin should have lived his home
to bless,

Or, must she die, I would have made to
fail

His useless love." "I tell you not the
less,"

He sighs, "because it was of no avail:

His heart the Poet would not dispossess
Thereof. But let us leave the fable now.
My Poet heard it with an aching brow.

"And he made answer thus: 'I thank
thee, youth;

Strange is thy story to these aged ears,
But I bethink me thou hast told a truth

Under the guise of fable. If my tears,
Thou lost beloved star, lost now, forsooth,
Indeed could bring thee back among
thy peers,

So new thou shouldst be deemed as newly
seen,

For men forget that thou hast ever been.

" 'There was a morning when I longed for
fame,

There was a noontide when I passed it
by,

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

There is an evening when I think not
shame

Its substance and its being to deny;
For if men bear in mind great deeds, the
name

Of him that wrought them shall they
leave to die;

Or if his name they shall have deathless
writ,

They change the deeds that first ennobled it.

“O golden letters of this monument!

O words to celebrate a loved renown
Lost now or wrested! and to fancies lent,
Or on a fabled forehead set for crown,
For my departed star, I am content,

Though legends dim and years her
memory drown:

For what were fame to her, compared
and set

By this great truth which ye make lus-
trous yet?’

“‘Adieu!’ the Poet said, ‘my vanished
star,

Thy duty and thy happiness were one.
Work is heaven’s hest; its fame is sub-
lunar:

The fame thou dost not need—the work
is done.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

For thee I am content that these things
are;

More than content were I, my race
being run,
Might it be true of me, though none
thereon
Should muse regretful—While he lived
he shone.'

"So said, the Poet rose and went his way,
And that same lot he proved whereof
he spake.

Madam, my story is told out; the day
Draws out her shadows, time doth over-
take

The morning. That which endeth call a
lay,

Sung after pause—a motto in the break
Between two chapters of a tale not new,
Nor joyful—but a common tale. Adieu!

"And that same God who made your
face so fair,

And gave your woman's heart its ten-
derness,

So shield the blessing He implanted there,
That it may never turn to your distress,
And never cost you trouble or despair,
Nor granted leave the granter comfort-
less;

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

But like a river blest where'er it flows,
Be still receiving while it still bestows.

"Adieu," he said, and paused, while she
sat mute

In the soft shadow of the apple-tree;
The skylark's song rang like a joyous
flute,

The brook went prattling past her rest-
lessly:

She let their tongues be her tongue's
substitute;

It was the wind that sighed, it was
not she:

And what the lark, the brook, the wind,
had said,

We cannot tell, for none interpreted.

Their counsels might be hard to reconcile,
They might not suit the moment or
the spot.

She rose, and laid her work aside the
while

Down in the sunshine of that grassy
plot;

She looked upon him with an almost
smile,

And held to him a hand that faltered
not.

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

One moment—bird and brook went warbling on,
And the wind sighed again—and he was gone.

So quietly, as if she heard no more
Or skylark in the azure overhead,
Or water slipping past the cressy shore,
Or wind that rose in sighs, and sighing fled—

So quietly, until the alders hoar
Took him beneath them; till the downward spread
Of planes engulfed him in their leafy seas—
She stood beneath her rose-flushed apple-trees.

And then she stooped toward the mossy grass,
And gathered up her work and went her way;
Straight to that ancient turret she did pass,
And startle back some fawns that were at play.
She did not sigh, she never said "Alas!"
Although he was her friend: but still that day,

THE STAR'S MONUMENT

Where elm and hornbeam spread a tower-
ing dome,
She crossed the dells to her ancestral
home.

And did she love him?—what if she did
not?

Then home was still the home of hap-
piest years;
Nor thought was exiled to partake his lot,
Nor heart lost courage through fore-
boding fears;
Nor echo did against her secret plot,
Nor music her betray to painful tears;
Nor life become a dream, and sunshine dim,
And riches poverty, because of him.

But did she love him?—what and if she
did?

Love cannot cool the burning Austral
sand,
Nor show the secret waters that lie hid
In arid valleys of that desert land.
Love has no spells can scorching winds
forbid,
Or bring the help which tarries near
to hand,
Or spread a cloud for curtaining faded
eyes
That gaze up dying into alien skies.

A Dead Year

I took a year out of my life and story—
A dead year, and said, "I will hew
thee a tomb!

'All the kings of the nations lie in glory;'
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred
gloom;
Swathed in linen, and precious unguents
old;
Painted with cinnabar, and rich with gold.

"Silent they rest, in solemn salvatory,
Sealed from the moth and the owl and
the flittermouse—

Each with his name on his brow.
'All the kings of the nations lie in
glory,
Every one in his own house':
Then why not thou?

"Year," I said, "thou shalt not lack
Bribes to bar thy coming back;
Doth old Egypt wear her best
In the chambers of her rest?

A DEAD YEAR

Doth she take to her last bed
Beaten gold, and glorious red?
Envy not! for thou wilt wear
In the dark a shroud as fair;
Golden with the sunny ray
Thou withdrawest from my day;
Wrought upon with colours fine
Stolen from this life of mine:
Like the dusty Libyan kings,
Lie with two wide-open wings
On thy breast, as if to say,
On these wings hope flew away;
And so housed, and thus adorned,
Not forgotten, but not scorned,
Let the dark for evermore
Close thee when I close the door;
And the dust for ages fall
In the creases of thy pall;
And no voice nor visit rude
Break thy sealèd solitude."

I took the year out of my life and story,
The dead year, and said, "I have hewed
thee a tomb!

'All the kings of the nations lie in glory',
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred
gloom;

But for the sword, and the sceptre, and
diadem,

Sure thou didst reign like them."

A DEAD YEAR

Scarce the sunset bloom was gone,
And the little stars outshone,
Ere the dead year, stiff and stark,
Drew me to her in the dark;
Death drew life to come to her,
Beating at her sepulchre,
Crying out, "How can I part
With the best share of my heart?
Lo, it lies upon the bier,"
Captive, with the buried year.
O my heart!" And I fell prone,
Weeping at the sealed stone;
"Year among the shades," I said,
"Since I live, and thou art dead,
Let my captive heart be free
Like a bird to fly to me."
And I stayed some voice to win,
But none answered from within;
And I kissed the door—and night
Deepened till the stars waxed bright;
And I saw them set and wane.
And the world turned green again.

"So," I whispered, "open door,
I must tread this palace floor—
Sealed palace, rich and dim.
Let a narrow sunbeam swim
After me, and on me spread
While I look upon my dead;

A DEAD YEAR

Let a little warmth be free
To come after; let me see
Through the doorway, when I sit
Looking out, the swallows flit,
Settling not till daylight goes;
Let me smell the wild white rose,
Smell the woodbine and the may;
Mark, upon a sunny day,
Sated from their blossoms rise
Honey-bees and butterflies.
Let me hear, O! let me hear,
Sitting by my buried year,
Finches chirping to their young,
And the little noises flung
Out of clefts where rabbits play,
Or from falling water-spray;
And the gracious echoes woke
By man's work: the woodman's
stroke,
Shout of shepherd, whistlings
blithe,
And the whetting of the scythe;
Let this be, lest, shut and furled
From the well-beloved world,
I forget her yearnings old,
And her troubles manifold,
Strivings sore, submissions meet,
And my pulse no longer beat,
Keeping time and bearing part
With the pulse of her great heart.

A DEAD YEAR

So! swing open door, and shade
Take me: I am not afraid,
For the time will not be long;
Soon I shall have waxen strong—
Strong enough my own to win
From the grave it lies within."

And I entered. On her bier
Quiet lay the buried year;
I sat down where I could see
Life without and sunshine free,
Death within. And I between,
Waited my own heart to wean
From the shroud that shaded her
In the rock-hewn sepulchre—
Waited till the dead should say,
"Heart, be free of me this day"—
Waited with a patient will—
AND I WAIT BETWEEN THEM STILL.

I take the year back to my life and story
The dead year, and say, "I will share in
thy tomb.

'All the kings of the nations lie in
glory';
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred
gloom!
They reigned in their lifetime with sceptre
and diadem,

But thou excellest them;

A DEAD YEAR

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To come after; let me see
Through the doorway, when I sit
Looking out, the swallows flit,
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The dead year, and say, "I will share in
thy tomb.

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glory';
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred
gloom!
They reigned in their lifetime with sceptre
and diadem,

But thou excellest them;

A DEAD YEAR

For life doth make thy grave her oratory,
And the crown is still on thy brow;
'All the kings of the nations lie in glory',
And so dost thou."

Reflections

WRITTEN FOR "THE
PORTFOLIO SOCIETY",
JULY 1862

Looking over a Gate at a Pool in a Field

What change has made the pastures sweet
And reached the daisies at my feet,
And cloud that wears a golden hem?
This lovely world, the hills, the sward—
They all look fresh, as if our Lord
But yesterday had finished them.

And here's the field with light aglow;
How fresh its boundary lime-trees show,
And how its wet leaves trembling shine!
Between their trunks come through to me
The morning sparkles of the sea
Below the level browsing line.

I see the pool more clear by half
Than pools where other waters laugh
Up at the breasts of coot and rail.

REFLECTIONS

There, as she passed it on her way,
I saw reflected yesterday
A maiden with a milking-pail.

There, neither slowly nor in haste,
One hand upon her slender waist,
The other lifted to her pail,
She rosy in the morning light,
Among the water-daisies white,
Like some fair sloop appeared to sail.

Against her ankles as she trod,
The lucky buttercups did nod.
I leaned upon the gate to see:
The sweet thing looked, but did not speak,
A dimple came in either cheek,
And all my heart was gone from me.

Then, as I lingered on the gate,
And she came up like coming fate,
I saw my picture in her eyes—
Clear dancing eyes, more black than sloes,
Cheeks like the mountain pink, that grows
Among white-headed majesties.

I said, "A tale was made of old
That I would fain to thee unfold;
Ah! let me—let me tell the tale."
But high she held her comely head;
"I cannot heed it now," she said,
"For carrying of the milking-pail."

REFLECTIONS

She laughed. What good to make ado?
I held the gate, and she came through,
And took her homeward path anon.
From the clear pool her face had fled;
It rested on my heart instead,
Reflected when the maid was gone.

With happy youth, and work content,
So sweet and stately on she went,
Right careless of the untold tale.
Each step she took I loved her more,
And followed to her dairy door
The maiden with the milking-pail.

II

For hearts where wakened love doth lurk,
How fine, how blest a thing is work!
For work does good when reasons fail—
Good; yet the axe at every stroke
The echo of a name awoke—
Her name is Mary Martindale.

I'm glad that echo was not heard
Aright by other men: a bird
Knows doubtless what his own notes tell;
And I know not, but I can say
I felt as shamefaced all that day
As if folks heard her name right well.

REFLECTIONS

And when the west began to glow
I went—I could not choose but go—
 To that same dairy on the hill;
And while sweet Mary moved about
Within, I came to her without,
 And leaned upon the window-sill.

The garden border where I stood
Was sweet with pinks and southernwood.
 I spoke—her answer seemed to fail:
I smelt the pinks—I could not see;
The dusk came down and sheltered me,
 And in the dusk she heard my tale.

And what is left that I should tell?
I begged a kiss, I pleaded well:
 The rosebud lips did long decline;
But yet I think, I think 'tis true,
That, leaned at last into the dew,
 One little instant they were mine.

O life! how dear thou hast become:
She laughed at dawn, and I was dumb,
 But evening counsels best prevail.
Fair shine the blue that o'er her spreads,
Green be the pastures where she treads,
 The maiden with the milking-pail!

The Letter L



ABSENT

We sat on grassy slopes that meet
With sudden dip the level strand;
The trees hung overhead—our feet
Were on the sand.

Two silent girls, a thoughtful man,
We sunned ourselves in open light,
And felt such April airs as fan
The Isle of Wight;

And smelt the wallflower in the crag
Whereon that dainty waft had fed,
Which made the bell-hung cowslip wag
Her delicate head;

And let alighting jackdaws fleet
Adown it open-winged, and pass
Till they could touch with outstretched feet
The warmed grass.

THE LETTER L

The happy wave ran up and rang
Like service bells a long way off,
And down a little freshet sprang
From mossy trough,

And splashed into a rain of spray,
And fretted on with daylight's loss,
Because so many blue-bells lay
Leaning across.

Blue martins gossiped in the sun,
And pairs of chattering daws flew by,
And sailing brigs rocked softly on
In company.

Wild cherry boughs above us spread
The whitest shade was ever seen,
And flicker, flicker, came and fled
Sun spots between.

Bees murmured in the milk-white bloom
As babes will sigh for deep content
When their sweet hearts for peace make
room,
As given, not lent.

And we saw on: we said no word,
And one was lost in musings rare,
One buoyant as the waft that stirred
Her shining hair.

THE LETTER I

His eyes were bent upon the sand,
Unfathomed deeps within them lay.
A slender rod was in his hand—
A hazel spray.

Her eyes were resting on his face,
As shyly glad, by stealth to glean
Impressions of his manly grace
And guarded mien;

The mouth with steady sweetness set,
And eyes conveying unaware
The distant hint of some regret
That harboured there.

She gazed, and in the tender flush
That made her face like roses blown,
And in the radiance and the hush,
Her thought was shown.

It was a happy thing to sit
So near, nor mar his reverie;
She looked not for a part in it,
So meek was she.

But it was solace for her eyes,
And for her heart, that yearned to him,
To watch apart in loving wise
Those musings dim.

THE LETTER L

Lost—lost, and gone! The Pelham woods
Were full of doves that cooed at ease;
The orchis filled her purple hoods
For dainty bees.

He heard not; all the delicate air
Was fresh with falling water-spray:
It mattered not—he was not there,
But far away.

Till with the hazel in his hand,
Still drowned in thought, it thus befell;
He drew a letter on the sand—
The letter L.

And looking on it, straight there wrought
A ruddy flush about his brow;
His letter woke him: absent thought
Rushed homeward now.

And half-abashed, his hasty touch
Effaced it with a tell-tale care,
As if his action had been much,
And not his air.

And she? she watched his open palm
Smooth out the letter from the sand,
And rose, with aspect almost calm,
And filled her hand

THE LETTER L

With cherry bloom, and moved away
To gather wild forget-me-not,
And let her errant footsteps stray
To one sweet spot.

As if she coveted the fair
White lining of the silver-weed,
And cuckoo-pint that shaded there
Empurpled seed.

She had not feared, as I divine,
Because she had not hoped. Alas!
The sorrow of it! for that sign
Came but to pass;

And yet it robbed her of the right
To give, who looked not to receive,
And made her blush in love's despite
That she should grieve.

A shape in white, she turned to gaze;
Her eyes were shaded with her hand,
And half-way up the winding ways
We saw her stand.

Green hollows of the fringed cliff,
Red rocks that under waters show,
Blue reaches, and a sailing skiff,
Were spread below.

THE LETTER L

She stood to gaze, perhaps to sigh,
Perhaps to think; but who can tell,
How heavy on her heart must lie
The letter L!

She came anon with quiet grace;
And "What," she murmured, "silent
yet!"
He answered, "'Tis a haunted place,
And spell-beset.

"O speak to us, and break the spell!"
"The spell is broken," she replied.
"I crossed the running brook, it fell,
It could not bide.

"And I have brought a budding world,
Of orchis spires and daisies rank,
And ferny plumes but half uncurled,
From yonder bank;

"And I shall weave of them a crown,
And at the well-head launch it free,
That so the brook may float it down,
And out to sea.

"There may it to some English hands
From fairy meadow seem to come;
The fairiest of fairy lands—
The land of home."

THE LETTER L

"Weave on," he said, and as she wove
We told how currents in the deep,
With branches from a lemon grove,
Blue bergs will sweep.

And messages from shipwrecked folk
Will navigate the moon-led main,
And painted boards of splintered oak
Their port regain.

Then floated out by vagrant thought,
My soul beheld on torrid sand
The wasteful water set at nought
Man's skilful hand,

And suck out gold-dust from the box,
And wash it down in weedy whirls,
And split the wine-keg on the rocks,
And lose the pearls.

"Ah! why to that which needs it not,"
Methought, "should costly things be
given?
How much is wasted, wrecked, forgot,
On this side heaven!"

So musing, did mine ears awake
To maiden tones of sweet reserve,
And manly speech that seemed to make
The steady curve

THE LETTER L

Of lips that uttered it defer
Their guard, and soften for the thought:
She listened, and his talk with her
Was fancy fraught.

"There is not much in liberty"—
With doubtful pauses he began;
And said to her and said to me,
"There was a man—

"There was a man who dreamed one night
That his dead father came to him;
And said, when fire was low, and light
Was burning dim—

"Why vagrant thus, my sometime pride,
Unloved, unloving, wilt thou roam?
Sure home is best!' The son replied,
'I have no home.'

"Shall not I speak?' his father said,
'Who early chose a youthful wife,
And worked for her, and with her led
My happy life.

"Ay, I will speak, for I was young
As thou art now, when I did hold
The prattling sweetness of thy tongue
Dearer than gold;

THE LETTER L

“‘And rosy from thy noonday sleep
Would bear thee to admiring kin,
And all thy pretty looks would keep
My heart within.

“‘Then after, ’mid thy young allies—
For thee ambition flushed my brow—
I coveted the schoolboy prize
Far more than thou.

“‘I thought for thee, I thought for all
My gamesome imps that round me grew;
The dews of blessing heaviest fall
Where care falls too.

“‘And I that sent my boys away,
In youthful strength to earn their bread,
And died before the hair was grey
Upon my head—

“‘I say to thee, though free from care,
A lonely lot, an aimless life,
The crowning comfort is not there—
Son, take a wife.’

“‘Father beloved,’ the son replied,
And failed to gather to his breast,
With arms in darkness searching wide,
The formless guest.

THE LETTER L

“‘I am but free, as sorrow is,
To dry her tears, to laugh, to talk;
And free, as sick men are, I wis
To rise and walk.

“‘And free, as poor men are, to buy,
If they have nought wherewith to pay;
Nor hope, the debt before they die,
To wipe away.

“‘What ’vails it there are wives to win,
And faithful hearts for those to yearn,
Who find not aught thereto akin
To make return?

“‘Shall he take much who little gives,
And dwells in spirit far away,
When she that in his presence lives,
Doth never stray,

“‘But waking, guideth as beseems
The happy house in order trim,
And tends her babes; and sleeping, dreams
Of them, and him?

“‘‘O base, O cold,’—while thus he spake
The dream broke off, the vision fled;
He carried on his speech awake
And sighing said—

THE LETTER L

“I had—ah happy man!—I had
A precious jewel in my breast,
And while I kept it I was glad
At work, at rest!

“Call it a heart, and call it strong
As upward stroke of eagle's wing;
Then call it weak, you shall not wrong
The beating thing.

“In tangles of the jungle reed,
Whose heats are lit with tiger eyes,
In shipwreck drifting with the weed
'Neath rainy skies,

“Still youthful manhood, fresh and keen,
At danger gazed with awed delight,
As if sea would not drown, I ween,
Nor serpent bite.

“I had—ah happy! but 't is gone,
The priceless jewel; one came by,
And saw and stood awhile to con
With curious eye,

“And wished for it, and faintly smiled
From under lashes black as doom,
With subtle sweetness, tender, mild,
That did illumine

THE LETTER L

“The perfect face, and shed on it
A charm, half feeling, half surprise,
And brim with dreams the exquisite
Brown blessed eyes.

“Was it for this, no more but this,
I took and laid it in her hand,
By dimples ruled, to hint submit,
By frown unmanned?

“It was for this—and O farewell
The fearless foot, the present mind,
And steady will to breast the swell
And face the wind!

“I gave the jewel from my breast,
She played with it a little while
As I sailed down into the west,
Fed by her smile;

“Then weary of it—far from land,
With sigh as deep as destiny,
She let it drop from her fair hand
Into the sea,

“And watched it sink; and I—and I,—
What shall I do, for all is vain?
No wave will bring, no gold will buy,
No toil attain;

THE LETTER L

“Nor any diver reach to raise
My jewel from the blue abyss;
Or could they, still I should but praise
Their work amiss.

“Thrown, thrown away! But I love yet
The fair, fair hand which did the deed:
That wayward sweetness to forget
Were bitter meed.

“No, let it lie, and let the wave
Roll over it for evermore;
Whelmed where the sailor hath his grave—
The sea her store.

“My heart, my sometime happy heart!
And O for once let me complain,
I must forgo life's better part—
Man's dearer gain.

“I worked afar that I might rear
A peaceful home on English soil;
I laboured for the gold and gear—
I loved my toil.

“For ever in my spirit spake
The natural whisper, 'Well 't will be
When loving wife and children break
Their bread with thee!'

THE LETTER L

“The gathered gold is turned to dross,
The wife hath faded into air,
My heart is thrown away, my loss
I cannot spare.

“Not spare unsated thought her food—
No, not one rustle of the fold,
Nor scent of eastern sandalwood,
Nor gleam of gold;

“Nor quaint devices of the shawl,
Far less the drooping lashes meek;
The gracious figure, lithe and tall,
The dimpled cheek;

“And all the wonders of her eyes,
And sweet caprices of her air,
Albeit, indignant reason cries,
‘Fool! have a care.

“Fool, join not madness to mistake;
Thou knowest she loved thee not a whit;
Only that she thy heart might break—
She wanted it,

“Only the conquered thing to chain
So fast that none might set it free,
Nor other woman there might reign
And comfort thee.

THE LETTER L

“ ‘ ‘ Robbed, robbed of life’s illusions sweet;
Love dead outside her closed door,
And passion fainting at her feet
To wake no more;

“ ‘ ‘ What canst thou give that unknown
bride
Whom thou didst work for in the waste,
Ere fated love was born, and cried—
Was dead, ungraced?

“ ‘ ‘ No more but this, the partial care,
The natural kindness for its own,
The trust that waxeth unaware,
As worth is known:

“ ‘ ‘ Observance, and complacent thought
Indulgent, and the honour due
That many another man has brought
Who brought love too.’

“ ‘ ‘ Nay, then, forbid it Heaven!’ he said,
‘ The saintly vision fades from me;
O bands and chains! I cannot wed—
I am not free.’ ”

With that he raised his face to view;
“ What think you,” asking, “ of my tale?
And was he right to let the dew
Of morn exhale,

THE LETTER L

"And burdened in the noontide sun,
The grateful shade of home forgo—
Could he be right—I ask as one
Who fain would know?"

He spoke to her and spoke to me;
The rebel rose-hue dyed her cheek;
The woven crown lay on her knee;
She would not speak.

And I with doubtful pause—averse
To let occasion drift away—
I answered—"If his case were worse
Than word can say,

"Time is a healer of sick hearts,
And women have been known to choose,
With purpose to allay their smarts,
And tend their bruise,

"These for themselves. Content to give,
In their own lavish love complete,
Taking for sole prerogative
Their tendance sweet.

"Such meeting in their diadem
Of crowning love's æthereal fire,
Himself he robs who robbeth them
Of their desire.

THE LETTER L

"Therefore the man who, dreaming, cried
Against his lot that evensong,
I judge him honest, and decide
That he was wrong."

"When I am judged, ah may my fate,"
He whispered, "in thy code be read!
Be thou both judge and advocate."
Then turned, he said—

"Fair weaver!" touching, while he spoke,
The woven crown, the weaving hand,
"And do you this decree revoke,
Or may it stand?"

"This friend, you ever think her right—
She is not wrong, then?" Soft and low
The little trembling word took flight:
She answered, "No."

PRESENT

A meadow where the grass was deep,
Rich, square, and golden to the view,
A belt of elms with level sweep
About it grew.

The sun beat down on it, the line
Of shade was clear beneath the trees;
There, by a clustering eglantine,
We sat at ease.

THE LETTER L

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THE LETTER L

And O the buttercups! that field
O' the cloth of gold, where pennons
swam—
Where France set up his liliated shield,
His oriflamme,

And Henry's lion-standard rolled:
What was it to their matchless sheen,
Their million million drops of gold
Among the green!

We sat at ease in peaceful trust,
For he had written, "Let us meet;
My wife grew tired of smoke and dust,
And London heat,

"And I have found a quiet grange,
Set back in meadows sloping west,
And there our little ones can range
And she can rest.

"Come down, that we may show the view,
And she may hear your voice again,
And talk her woman's talk with you
Along the lane."

Since he had drawn with listless hand
The letter, six long years had fled,
And winds had blow about the sand,
And they were wed.

THE LETTER L

Two rosy urchins near him played,
Or watched, entranced, the shapely ships
That with his knife for them he made
Of elder slips.

And where the flowers were thickest shed,
Each blossom like a burnished gem,
A creeping baby reared its head,
And cooed at them.

And calm was on the father's face,
And love was in the mother's eyes;
She looked and listened from her place,
In tender wise.

She did not need to raise her voice
That they might hear, she sat so nigh;
Yet we could speak when 't was our choice,
And soft reply.

Holding our quiet talk apart
Of household things; till, all unsealed,
The guarded outworks of the heart
Began to yield;

And much that prudence will not dip
The pen to fix and send away,
Passed safely over from the lip
That summer day.

THE LETTER L

"I should be happy," with a look
Towards her husband where he lay
Lost in the pages of his book,
Soft did she say.

"I am, and yet no lot below
For one whole day eludeth care;
To marriage all the stories flow,
And finish there:

"As if with marriage came the end,
The entrance into settled rest,
The calm to which love's tossings tend,
The quiet breast.

"For me love played the low preludes,
Yet life began but with the ring,
Such infinite solitudes
Around it cling.

"I did not for my heart divine
Her destiny so meek to grow;
The higher nature matched with mine
Will have it so.

"Still I consider it, and still
Acknowledge it my master made,
Above me by the steadier will
Of nought afraid.

THE LETTER L

"Above me by the candid speech;
The temperate judgment of its own:
The keener thoughts that grasp and reach,
At things unknown.

"But I look up and he looks down,
And thus our married eyes can meet;
Unclouded his, and clear of frown,
And gravely sweet.

"And yet, O good, O wise and true!
I would for all my fealty,
That I could be as much to you
As you to me;

"And knew the deep secure content
Of wives who have been hardly won,
And, long petitioned, gave assent,
Jealous of none.

"But proudly sure in all the earth
No other in that homage shares,
Nor other woman's face or worth
Is prized as theirs."

"I said: '*And yet no lot below
For one whole day eludeth care.*'
Your thought." She answered, "Even so.
I would beware

THE LETTER L

"Regretful questionings; be sure
That very seldom do they rise,
Nor for myself do I endure—
I sympathize.

"For once"—she turned away her head,
Across the grass she swept her hand—
"There was a letter once," she said,
"Upon the sand."

"There was, in truth, a letter writ
On sand," I said, "and swept from view;
But that same hand which fashioned it
Is given to you.

"Efface the letter; wherefore keep
An image which the sands forgo?"
"Albeit that fear had seemed to sleep,"
She answered low,

"I could not choose but wake it now;
For do but turn aside your face,
A house on yonder hilly brow
Your eyes may trace.

"The chestnut shelters it; ah me,
That I should have so faint a heart!
But yestereve, as by the sea
I sat apart,

THE LETTER L

"I heard a name, I saw a hand
Of passing stranger point that way—
And will he meet her on the strand,
When late we stray?

"For she is come, for she is there,
I heard it in the dusk, and heard
Admiring words, that named her fair,
But little stirred

"By beauty of the wood and wave,
And weary of an old man's sway;
For it was sweeter to enslave
Than to obey."

—The voice of one that near us stood,
The rustle of a silken fold,
A scent of eastern sandalwood,
A gleam of gold!

A lady! In the narrow space
Between the husband and the wife,
But nearest him—she showed a face
With dangers rife;

A subtle smile that dimpling fled,
As night-black lashes rose and fell:
I looked, and to myself I said
"The letter L.

THE LETTER L

He, too, looked up, and with arrest
Of breath and motion held his gaze,
Nor cared to hide within his breast
His deep amaze;

Nor spoke till on her near advance
His dark cheek flushed a ruddier hue;
And with his change of countenance
Hers altered too.

"Lenore!" his voice was like the cry
Of one entreating; and he said
But that—then paused with such a sigh
As mourns the dead.

And seated near, with no demur
Of bashful doubt she silence broke,
Though I alone could answer her
When first she spoke.

She looked: her eyes were beauty's own;
She shed their sweetness into his;
Nor spared the married wife one moan
That bitterest is.

She spoke, and lo, her loveliness
Methought she damaged with her tongue;
And every sentence made it less,
So false they rung,

THE LETTER L*

The rallying voice, the light demand,
Half flippant, half unsatisfied;
The vanity sincere and bland—
The answers wide.

And now her talk was of the East,
And next her talk was of the sea;
“And has the love for it increased
You shared with me?”

He answered not, but grave and still
With earnest eyes her face perused,
And locked his lips with steady will,
As one that mused—

That mused and wondered. Why his gaze
Should dwell on her, methought, was
plain;
But reason that should wonder raise
I sought in vain.

And near and near the children drew,
Attracted by her rich array,
And gems that trembling into view
Like raindrops lay.

He spoke: the wife her baby took
And pressed the little face to hers;
What pain soe'er her bosom shook,
What jealous stirs

THE LETTER L

Might stab her heart, she hid them so,
The coöing babe a veil supplied;
And if she listened none might know,
Or if she sighed;

Or if forecasting grief and care
Unconscious solace thence she drew,
And lulled her babe, and unaware
Lulled sorrow too.

The lady, she interpreter
For looks or language wanted none,
If yet dominion stayed with her—
So lightly won;

If yet the heart she wounded sore
Could yearn to her, and let her see
The homage that was evermore
Disloyalty;

If sign would yield that it had bled,
Or rallied from the faithless blow,
Or sick or sullen stooped to wed,
She craved to know.

Now dreamy deep, now sweetly keen,
Her asking eyes would round him shine;
But guarded lips and settled mien
Refused the sign.

THE LETTER L

And unbeguiled and unbetrayed,
The wonder yet within his breast,
It seemed a watchful part he played
Against her quest.

Until with accent of regret
She touched upon the past once more,
As if she dared him to forget
His dream of yore.

And words of little weight let fall
The fancy of the lower mind;
How waxing life must needs leave all
Its best behind;

How he had said that "he would fain
(One morning on the halcyon sea)
That life would at a stand remain
Eternally;

"And sails be mirrored in the deep,
As then they were, for evermore,
And happy spirits wake and sleep
Afar from shore:

"The well-contented heart be fed
Ever as then, and all the world
(It were not small) unshadowed
When sails were furled.

THE LETTER L

"Your words"—a pause, and quietly
With touch of calm self-ridicule:
"It may be so—for then," said he,
"I was a fool."

With that he took his book, and left
An awkward silence to my care,
That soon I filled with questions deft
And debonair;

And slid into an easy vein,
The favourite picture of the year;
The grouse upon her lord's domain—
The salmon weir;

Till she could feign a sudden thought
Upon neglected guests, and rise,
And make us her adieux, with nought
In her dark eyes

Acknowledging or shame or pain;
But just unveiling for our view
A little smile of still disdain
As she withdrew.

Then nearer did the sunshine creep,
And warmer came the wafting breeze;
The little babe was fast asleep
On mother's knees.

THE LETTER L

Fair was the face that o'er it leant,
The cheeks with beauteous blushes dyed;
The downcast lashes, shyly bent,
That failed to hide

Some tender shame. She did not see;
She felt his eyes that would not stir,
She looked upon her babe, and he
So looked at her.

So grave, so wondering, so content,
As one new waked to conscious life,
Whose sudden joy with fear is blent,
He said, "My wife."

"My wife, how beautiful you are!"
Then closer at her side reclined,
"The bold brown woman from afar
Comes, to me blind.

"And by comparison, I see
The majesty of matron grace,
And learn how pure, how fair can be
My own wife's face:

"Pure with all faithful passion, fair
With tender smiles that come and go;
And comforting as April air
After the snow.

THE LETTER L

"Fool that I was! my spirit frets
And marvels at the humbling truth,
That I have deigned to spend regrets
On my bruised youth.

"Its idol mocked thee, seated nigh,
And shamed me for the mad mistake;
I thank my God He could deny,
And she forsake.

"Ah, who am I, that God hath saved
Me from the doom I did desire,
And crossed the lot myself had craved,
To set me higher?

"What have I done that He should bow
From heaven to choose a wife for me?
And what deserved, He should endow
My home with THEE?

"My wife!" With that she turned her
face
To kiss the hand about her neck;
And I went down and sought the place
Where leaped the beck—

The busy beck, that still would run
And fall, and falter its refrain;
And pause and shimmer in the sun,
And fall again.

THE LETTER L

It led me to the sandy shore,
We sang together, it and I—
"The daylight comes, the dark is o'er,
The shadows fly."

I lost it on the sandy shore,
"O wife!" its latest murmurs fell,
"O wife, be glad, and fear no more,
The letter L."

The High Tide
on the Coast of
Lincolnshire (1571)

The old mayor climbed the belfry tower,
The ringers ran by two, by three;
"Pull if ye never pulled before;
Good ringers, pull your best," quoth
he.

"Play uppe, play uppe, O Boston bells!
Ply all your changes, all your swells,
Play uppe 'The Brides of Enderby'."

Men say it was a stolen tyde—
The Lord that sent it, He knows all;
But in myne ears doth still abide
The message that the bells let fall:
And there was nought of strange, beside
The flights of mews and peewits pied
By millions crouched on the old sea
wall.

I sat and spun within the doore,
My thread brake off, I raised myne
eyes;

THE HIGH TIDE

The level sun, like ruddy ore,
Lay sinking in the barren skies;
And dark against day's golden death
She moved where Lindis wandereth,
My sonne's faire wife, Elizabeth.

"Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!" calling,
Ere the early dews were falling,
Farre away I heard her song.
"Cusha! Cusha!" all along;
Where the reedy Lindis floweth,
Floweth, floweth,
From the meads where melick groweth
Faintly came her milking song—

"Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!" calling,
"For the dews will soone be falling;
Leave your meadow grasses mellow,
Mellow, mellow;
Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow;
Come uppe Whitefoot, come uppe Light-
foot;
Quit the stalks of parsley hollow,
Hollow, hollow;
Come uppe Jetty, rise and follow,
From the clovers lift your head;
Come uppe Whitefoot, come uppe Light
foot,
Come uppe Jetty, rise and follow,
Jetty, to the milking shed."

THE HIGH TIDE

If it be long, ay, long ago,
When I beginne to think howe long,
Againe I hear the Lindis flow,
Swift as an arrowe, sharpe and strong;
And all the aire, it seemeth mee,
Bin full of floating bells (sayth shee),
That ring the tune of Enderby.

Alle fresh the level pasture lay,
And not a shadowe mote be seene,
Save where full fyve good miles away
The steeple towered from out the
greene;
And lo! the great bell farre and wide
Was heard in all the country side
That Saturday at eventide.

The swanherds where their sedges are
Moved on in sunset's golden breath,
The shepherde lads I heard asfarre,
And my sonne's wife, Elizabeth;
Till floating o'er the grassy sea
Came downe that kyndly message free,
The "Brides of Mavis Enderby".

Then some looked uppe into the sky,
And all along where Lindis flows
To where the goodly vessels lie,
And where the lordly steeple shows.
They sayde, "And why should this thing be?"

THE HIGH TIDE

What danger lowers by land or sea?
They ring the tune of Enderby!

“For evil news from Mablethorpe,
Of pyrate galleys warping down;
For shippes ashore beyond the scorpe,
They have not spared to wake the
towne:

But while the west bin red to see,
And storms be none, and pyrates flee,
Why ring ‘The Brides of Enderby’?”

I looked without, and lo! my sonne
Came riding downe with might and
main:

He raised a shout as he drew on,
Till all the welkin rang again,
“Elizabeth! Elizabeth!”
(A sweeter woman ne’er drew breath
Than my sonne’s wife, Elizabeth.)

“The olde sea wall (he cried) is downe,
The rising tide comes on apace,
And boats adrift in yonder towne
Go sailing uppe the market-place.”
He shook as one that looks on death:
“God save you, mother!” straight he
saith;
“Where is my wife, Elizabeth?”

THE HIGH TIDE

“Good sonne, where Lindis winds away,
With her two bairns I marked her
long;

And ere yon bells beganne to play
Afar I heard her milking song.”
He looked across the grassy lea,
To right, to left, “Ho Enderby!”
They rang “The Brides of Enderby”!

With that he cried and beat his breast;
For, lo! along the river's bed
A mighty eygre reared his crest,
And uppe the Lindis raging sped.
It swept with thunderous noises loud;
Shaped like a curling snow-white cloud,
Or like a demon in a shroud.

And rearing Lindis backward pressed
Shook all her trembling bankes amaine;
Then madly at the eygre's breast
Flung uppe her weltering walls again.
Then bankes came downe with ruin and
rout—
Then beaten foam flew around about—
Then all the mighty floods were out.

So farre, so fast the eygre drave,
The heart had hardly time to beat,
Before a shallow seething wave
Sobbed in the grasses at oure feet:

THE HIGH TIDE

The feet had hardly time to flee
Before it brake against the knee,
And all the world was in the sea.

Upon the rooffe we sate that night,
The noise of bells went sweeping by;
I marked the lofty beacon light
Stream from the church tower, red and
high—
A lurid mark and dread to see;
And awsome bells they were to mee,
That in the dark rang "Enderby".

They rang the sailor lads to guide
From rooffe to rooffe who fearless rowed;
And I—my sonne was at my side,
And yet the ruddy beacon glowed;
And yet he moaned beneath his breath,
"Oh come in life, or come in death!
O lost! my love, Elizabeth."

And didst thou visit him no more?
Thou didst, thou didst, my daughter
deare;
The waters laid thee at his doore,
Ere yet the early dawn was clear.
Thy pretty bairns in fast embrace,
The lifted sun shone on thy face,
Downe drifted to thy dwelling-place.

THE HIGH TIDE

That flow strewed wrecks about the
grass,

That ebbe swept out the flocks to sea;
A fatal ebbe and flow, alas!

To manye more than myne and mee:
But each will mourn his own (she saith).
And sweeter woman ne'er drew breath
Than my sonne's wife, Elizabeth.

I shall never hear her more
By the reedy Lindis shore,
"Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!" calling,
Ere the early dewes be falling;
I shall never hear her song,
"Cusha! Cusha!" all along
Where the sunny Lindis floweth,
Goeth, floweth;
From the meads where melick groweth,
When the water winding down,
Onward floweth to the town.

I shall never see her more
Where the reeds and rushes quiver,
Shiver, quiver;
Stand beside the sobbing river,
Sobbing, throbbing, in its falling
To the sandy lonesome shore;
I shall never hear her calling,
"Leave your meadow grasses mellow,
Mellow, mellow;

THE HIGH TIDE

Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow;
Come uppe Whitefoot, come uppe Light-
foot;

Quit your pipes of parsley hollow,
Hollow, hollow;

Come uppe Lightfoot, rise and follow;
Lightfoot, Whitefoot,

From your clovers lift the head;

Come uppe Jetty, follow, follow,

Jetty, to the milking shed."

Afternoon at
a Parsonage

*(The Parson's Brother, Sister, and Two
Children.)*

Preface

What wonder man should fail to stay
A nurseling wafted from above,
The growth celestial come astray,
That tender growth whose name is
Love!

It is as if high winds in heaven
Had shaken the celestial trees,
And to this earth below had given
Some feathered seeds from one of these.

O perfect love that 'dureth long!
Dear growth, that shaded by the palms,
And breathed on by the angel's song,
Blooms on in heaven's eternal calms!

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

How great the task to guard thee here,
Where wind is rough, and frost is
keen,
And all the ground with doubt and fear
Is chequered birth and death between!

Space is against thee—it can part;
Time is against thee—it can chill;
Words—they but render half the heart;
Deeds—they are poor to our rich will.

Merton. Though she had loved me, I
had never bound
Her beauty to my darkness; that had
been
Too hard for her. Sadder to look so
near
Into a face all shadow, than to stand
Aloof, and then withdraw, and afterwards
Suffer forgetfulness to comfort her.
I think so, and I loved her; therefore I
Have no complaint; albeit she is not
mine:
And yet—and yet, withdrawing I would
fain
She would have pleaded duty—would have
said
“My father wills it;” would have turned
away,

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

As lingering, or unwillingly; for then
She would have done no damage to the
past:

Now she has roughly used it—flung it
down

And brushed its bloom away. If she had
said,

“Sir, I have promised; therefore, lo! my
hand”—

Would I have taken it? Ah no! by all
Most sacred, no!

I would for my sole share
Have taken first her recollected blush
The day I won her; next her shining
tears—

The tears of our long parting; and for all
The rest—her cry, her bitter heart-sick
cry,

That day or night (I know not which it
was,

The days being always night), that darkest
night,

When being led to her I heard her cry,
“O blind! blind! blind!”

Go with thy chosen mate:
The fashion of thy going nearly cured
The sorrow of it. I am yet so weak
That half my thoughts go after thee; but
not

So weak that I desire to have it so.

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

JESSIE, seated at the piano, sings

When the dimpled water slippeth,
Full of laughter, on its way,
And her wing the wagtail dippeth,
Running by the brink at play;
When the poplar leaves atremble
Turn their edges to the light,
And the far-up clouds resemble
Veils of gauze most clear and white;
And the sunbeams fall and flatter
Woodland moss and branches brown,
And the glossy finches chatter
Up and down, up and down:
Though the heart be not attending,
Having music of her own,
On the grass, through meadows wending,
It is sweet to walk alone.
When the falling waters utter
Something mournful on their way,
And departing swallows flutter,
Taking leave of bank and brae;
When the chaffinch idly sitteth
With her mate upon the sheaves,
And the wistful robin flitteth
Over beds of yellow leaves;
When the clouds, like ghosts that ponder
Evil fate, float by and frown,
And the listless wind doth wander
Up and down, up and down:
Though the heart be not attending,
Having sorrows of her own,

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

Through the fields and fallows wending,
It is sad to walk alone.

Merton. Blind ! blind ! blind !
Oh ! sitting in the dark for evermore,
And doing nothing—putting out a hand
To feel what lies about me, and to say
Not “This is blue or red,” but “This is
cold,
And this the sun is shining on, and this
I know not till they tell its name to
me.”

O that I might behold once more, my
God !
The shining rulers of the night and day ;
Or a star twinkling ; or an almond-tree,
Pink with her blossom and alive with
bees,
Standing against the azure ! O my
sight !
Lost, and yet living in the sunlit cells
Of memory—that only lightsome place
Where lingers yet the dayspring of my
youth :
The years of mourning for thy death are
long.

Be kind, sweet memory ! O desert me not !
For oft thou show'st me lucent opal seas,

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

Fringed with their cocoa-palms, and
dwarf red crags,
Whereon the placid moon doth "rest her
chin";
For oft by favour of thy visitings
I feel the dimness of an Indian night,
And lo! the sun is coming. Red as
rust
Between the latticed blind his presence
burns,
A ruby ladder running up the wall;
And all the dust, printed with pigeons'
feet,
Is reddened, and the crows that stalk
anear
Begin to trail for heat their glossy
wings,
And the red flowers give back at once the
dew,
For night is gone, and day is born so
fast,
And is so strong, that, huddled as in
flight,
The fleeting darkness paleteth to a shade,
And while she calls to sleep and dreams
"Come on,"
Suddenly waked, the sleepers rub their
eyes,
Which having opened, lo! she is no
more.

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

O misery and mourning! I have felt—
Yes, I have felt like some deserted world
That God had done with, and had cast
aside

To rock and stagger through the gulfs of
space,

He never looking on it any more—
Untilled, no use, no pleasure, not desired,
Nor lighted on by angels in their flight
From heaven to happier planets, and the
race

That once had dwelt on it withdrawn or
dead.

Could such a world have hope that some
blest day

God would remember her, and fashion her
Anew?

Jessie. What, dearest? Did you speak
to me?

Child. I think he spoke to us.

M. No, little elves,

You were so quiet that I half forgot
Your neighbourhood. What are you doing
there?

J. They sit together on the window-mat
Nursing their dolls.

C. Yes, Uncle, our new dolls—
Our best dolls, that you gave us.

M. Did you say
The afternoon was bright?

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

J. Yes, bright indeed!
The sun is on the plane-tree, and it flames
All red and orange.

C. I can see my father—
Look! look! the leaves are falling on his
gown.

M. Where?

C. In the churchyard, Uncle—
he is gone;
He passed behind the tower.

M. I heard a bell:
There is a funeral, then, behind the

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

And then she will. Papa knows everything—

He said she would before he planted her.

2nd Child. It was at night she went to heaven. Last night

We saw a star before we went to bed.

1st Child. Yes, Uncle, did you know?

A large bright star,

And at her side she had some little ones—
Some young ones.

M. Young ones! no, my little maid,
Those stars are very old.

1st Child. What! all of them?

M. Yes.

1st Child. Older than our father?

M. Older, far.

2nd Child. They must be tired of shining
there so long.

Perhaps they wish they might come down.

J. Perhaps!

Dear children, talk of what you understand.

Come, I must lift the trailing creepers up
That last night's wind has loosened.

1st Child. May we help?

Aunt, may we help to nail them?

J. We shall see.

Go, find and bring the hammer, and some
shreds.

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

[Steps outside the window, lifts
a branch, and sings]

Should I change my allegiance for rancour
If fortune changes her side?
Or should I, like a vessel at anchor,
Turn with the turn of the tide?
Lift! O lift, thou lowering sky;
An thou wilt, thy gloom forgo!
An thou wilt not, he and I
Need not part for drifts of snow.

M. [within]. Lift! no, thou lowering sky,
thou wilt not lift—

Thy motto readeth, "Never".

Children.

Here they are!

Here are the nails! and may we help?

J.

You shall,

If I should want help.

1st Child.

Will you want it, then?

Please want it—we like nailing.

and Child.

Yes, we do.

J. It seems I ought to want it; hold
the bough,

And each may nail in turn.

[Sings]

Like a daisy I was, near him growing:
Must I move because favours flag,
And be like a brown wallflower blowing
Far out of reach in a crag?

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

Lift! O lift, thou lowering sky;
An thou canst, thy blue regain!
An thou canst not, he and I
Need not part for drops of rain.

1st Child. Now, have we nailed enough?

J. [trains the creepers]. Yes, you may go;
But do not play too near the churchyard
path.

M. [within]. Even misfortune does not
strike so near

As my dependence. O, in youth and
strength

To sit a timid coward in the dark,
And feel before I set a cautious step!
It is so very dark, so far more dark
Than any night that day comes after—night
In which there would be stars, or else
at least

The silvered portion of a sombre cloud
Through which the moon is plunging.

J. [entering]. Merton!

M. Yes.

J. Dear Merton, did you know that I
could hear?

M. No: e'en my solitude i mine
now,

And if I be alone is ofttime
Alas! far more than eyesight
For manly courage drifteth a

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

E'en as a splintered spar would drift away
From some dismasted wreck. Hear, I
complain—

Like a weak ailing woman I complain.

J. For the first time.

M. I cannot bear the dark.

J. My brother! you do bear it—bear
it well—

Have borne it twelve long months, and
not complained.

Comfort your heart with music: all the air
Is warm with sunbeams where the organ
stands.

You like to feel them on you. Come and
play.

M. My fate, my fate is lonely!

J. So it is—

I know it is.

M. And pity breaks my heart.

J. Does it, dear Merton?

M. Yes, I say it does.

What! do you think I am so dull of ear
That I can mark no changes in the tones
That reach me? Once I liked not girlish
pride

And that coy quiet, chary of reply,
That held me distant: now the sweetest lips
Open to entertain me—fairest hands
Are proffered me to guide.

J. That is not well?

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

M. No: give me coldness, pride, or still
disdain,
Gentle withdrawal. Give me anything
But this—a fearless, sweet, confiding ease,
Whereof I may expect, I may exact,
Considerate care and have it—gentle
speech,
And have it. Give me anything but this!
For they who give it, give it in the faith
That I will not misdeem them, and for-
get
My doom so far as to perceive thereby
Hope of a wife. They make this thought
too plain;
They wound me—O they cut me to the
heart!
When have I said to any one of them,
“I am a blind and desolate man;—come
here,
T pray you—be as eyes to me?” When
T said,
Even to her whose pitying voice is sweet
To my dark ruined heart, as must be hands
That clasp a lifelong captive’s through the
grate,
And who will ever lend her delicate aid
To guide me, dark incumbrance that I
am!—
When have I said to her, “Comforting
voice,

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

Belonging to a face unknown, I pray
Be my wife's voice!"

J. Never, my brother—no,
You never have!

M. What could she think of me
If I forgot myself so far? or what
Could she reply?

J. You ask not as men ask
Who care for an opinion, else perhaps,
Although I am not sure—although, per-
haps,

I have no right to give one—I should say
She would reply, "I will!"

Afterthought

Man dwells apart, though not alone,
He walks among his peers unread;
The best of thoughts which he hath known,
For lack of listeners are not said.

Yet dreaming on earth's clustered isles,
He saith, "They dwell not lone like men,
Forgetful that their sunflecked smiles
Flash far beyond each other's ken."

He looks on God's eternal suns
That sprinkle the celestial blue,
And saith, "Ah! happy shining ones,
I would that men were grouped like you!"

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE

Yet this is sure: the loveliest star
That clustered with its peers we see,
Only because from us so far
Doth near its fellows seem to be.

Songs of Seven

SEVEN TIMES ONE. EXULTATION

There's no dew left on the daisies and
clover,

There's no rain left in heaven:
I've said my "seven times" over and over,
Seven times one are seven.

I am old, so old, I can write a letter;
My birthday lessons are done;
The lambs play always, they know no
better;
They are only one times one.

O moon! in the night I have seen you
sailing
And*shining so round and low;
You were bright! ah bright! but your
light is failing—
You are nothing but a bow.

You moon, have you done something wrong
in heaven
That God has hidden your face?

SONGS OF SEVEN

I hope if you have you will soon be for-
given,
And shine again in your place.

O velvet bee, you're a dusty fellow,
You've powdered your legs with gold!
O brave marsh marybuds, rich and yellow,
Give me your money to hold!

O columbine, open your folded wrapper,
Where two twin turtle-doves dwell!
O cuckoopint, toll me the purple clapper
That hangs in your clear green bell!

And show me your nest with the young
ones in it;
I will not steal them away;
I am old! you may trust me, linnet,
linnet—
I am seven times one to-day.

SEVEN TIMES TWO. ROMANCE

You bells in the steeple, ring, ring out
your changes,
How many soever they be,
And let the brown meadow-lark's note as
he ranges
Come over, come over to me.

SONGS OF SEVEN

Yet bird's clearest carol by fall or by
swelling
No magical sense conveys,
And bells have forgotten their old art of
telling
The fortune of future days.

"Turn again, turn again," once they rang
cheerily,
While a boy listened alone;
Made his heart yearn again, musing so
wearily
All by himself on a stone.

Poor bells! I forgive you; your good days
are over,
And mine, they are yet to be;
No listening, no longing shall aught,
aught discover:
You leave the story to me.

The foxglove shoots out of the green
matted heather,
Preparing her hoods of snow;
She was idle, and slept till the sunshiny
weather:
O, children take long to grow.

SONGS OF SEVEN

I wish, and I wish that the spring would
go faster,
Nor long summer bide so late;
And I could grow on like the foxglove
and aster,
For some things are ill to wait.

I wait for the day when dear hearts shall
discover,
While dear hands are laid on my head;
"The child is a woman, the book may
close over,
For all the lessons are said."

I wait for my story—the birds cannot
sing it,
Not one, as he sits on the tree;
The bells cannot ring it, but long
O bring it!
Such as I wish it to be.

SONGS OF SEVEN

"Now, if there be footsteps, he comes,
my one lover—

Hush, nightingale, hush! O, sweet
nightingale, wait

Till I listen and hear
If a step draweth near,
For my love he is late!

"The skies in the darkness stoop nearer
and nearer,

A cluster of stars hangs like fruit in
the tree,

The fall of the water comes sweeter, comes
clearer:

To what art thou listening, and what
dost thou see?

Let the star-clusters grow,
Let the sweet waters flow,
And cross quickly to me.

SONGS OF SEVEN

Ah, my sailor, make haste,
For the time runs to waste,
And my love lieth deep—

“Too deep for swift telling; and yet, my
one lover,

I’ve conned thee an answer, it waits
thee to-night.”

By the sycamore passed he, and through
the white clover,

Then all the sweet speech I had fashioned
took flight;

But I’ll love him more, more

Than e’er wife loved before,

Be the days dark or bright.

SEVEN TIMES FOUR. MATERNITY

Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,

Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall!

When the wind wakes how they rock in
the grasses,

And dance with the cuckoo-buds slender
and small!

Here’s two bonny boys, and here’s mother’s
own lasses,

Eager to gather them all.

SONGS OF SEVEN

Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups!
Mother shall thread them a daisy chain;
Sing them a song of the pretty hedge
sparrow,
That loved her brown little ones, loved
them full fain;
Sing, "Heart, thou art wide though the
house be but narrow"—
Sing once, and sing it again.

Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,
Sweet wagging cowslips, they bend and
they bow;
A ship sails afar over warm ocean waters,
And haply one musing doth stand at
her prow.
O bonny brown sons, and O sweet little
daughters,
Maybe he thinks on you now!

Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall—
A sunshiny world full of laughter and
leisure,
And fresh hearts unconscious of sorrow
and thrall!
Send down on their pleasure smiles passing
its measure,
God that is over us all!

SONGS OF SEVEN

SEVEN TIMES FIVE. WIDOWHOOD

I sleep and rest, my heart makes moan
Before I am well awake;
Let me bleed! O let me alone,
Since I must not break.

For children wake, though fathers sleep
With a stone at foot and at head:
O sleepless God, for ever keep,
Keep both living and dead!

I lift mine eyes, and what to see
But a world happy and fair!
I have not wished it to mourn with me—
Comfort is not there.

O what anear but golden brooms,
And a waste of reedy rills!
O what afar but the fine glooms
On the rare blue hills!

I shall not die, but live forlore—
How bitter it is to part!
O to meet thee, my love, once more!
O my heart, my heart!

No more to hear, no more to see!
O that an echo might wake
And waft one note of thy psalm to me
Ere my heart-strings break!

SONGS OF SEVEN

I should know it how faint spe'er,
And with angel voices blent;
O once to feel thy spirit anear;
I could be content!

Or once between the gates of gold,
While an entering angel trod,
But once—thee sitting to behold
On the hills of God!

SEVEN TIMES SIX. GIVING IN MARRIAGE

To bear, to nurse, to rear,
To watch, and then to lose:
To see my bright ones disappear,
Drawn up like morning dew—
To bear, to nurse, to rear,
To watch, and then to lose:
This have I done when God drew near
Among his own to choose.

To hear, to heed, to wed,
And with thy lord depart
In tears that he, as soon as shed,
Will let no longer smart.—
To hear, to heed, to wed,
This while thou didst I smiled,
For now it was not God who said
“Mother, give ME thy child.”

SONGS OF SEVEN

O fond, O fool, and blind,
To God I gave with tears;
But when a man like grace would find,
My soul put by her fears—
O fond, O fool, and blind,
God guards in happier spheres;
That man will guard where he did bind
Is hope for unknown years.

To hear, to heed, to wed,
Fair lot that maidens choose,
Thy mother's tenderest words are said,
Thy face no more she views;
Thy mother's lot, my dear,
She doth in nought accuse;
Her lot to bear, to nurse, to rear,
To love—and then to lose.

SEVEN TIMES SEVEN. LONGING FOR HOME

I

A song of a boat:—
There was once a boat on a billow:
Lightly she rocked to her port remote,
And the foam was white in her wake
like snow,
And her frail mast bowed when the breeze
would blow
And bent like a wand of willow.

SONGS OF SEVEN

II

I shaded mine eyes one day when a boat
Went curtseying over the billow,
I marked her course till a dancing mote
She faded out on the moonlit foam,
And I stayed behind in the dear loved home;
And my thoughts all day were about
the boat
And my dreams upon the pillow.

III

I pray you hear my song of a boat,
For it is but short:—
My boat, you shall find none fairer afloat,
In river or port.
Long I looked out for the lad she bore,
On the open desolate sea,
And I think he sailed to the heavenly shore,
For he came not back to me—
Ah me!

IV

A song of a nest:—
There was once a nest in a hollow:
Down in the mosses and knot-grass
pressed,
Soft and warm, and full to the brim—
Vetches leaned over it purple and dim,
With buttercup buds to follow.

SONGS OF SEVEN

O fond, O fool, and blind,
To God I gave with tears;
But when a man like grace would find,
My soul put by her fears—
O fond, O fool, and blind,
God guards in happier spheres;
That man will guard where he did bind
Is hope for unknown years.

To hear, to heed, to wed,
Fair lot that maidens choose,
Thy mother's tenderest words are said,
Thy face no more she views;
Thy mother's lot, my dear,
She doth in nought accuse;
Her lot to bear, to nurse, to rear,
To love—and then to lose.

SEVEN TIMES SEVEN. LONGING FOR HOME

I

A song of a boat:—
There was once a boat on a billow:
Lightly she rocked to her port remote,
And the foam was white in her wake
like snow,
And her frail mast bowed when the breeze
would blow
And bent like a wand of willow.

SONGS OF SEVEN

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Went curtseying over the billow,
I marked her course till a dancing mote
She faded out on the moonlit foam,
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Soft and warm, and full to the brim—
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With buttercup buds to follow.

SONGS OF SEVEN

V

I pray you hear my song of a nest,
For it is not long:—
You shall never light, in a summer quest
The bushes among—
Shall never light on a prouder sitter,
A fairer nestful, nor ever know
A softer sound than their tender twitter,
That wind-like did come and go.

VI

I had a nestful once of my own,
Ah happy, happy I!
Right dearly I loved them: but when they
were grown
They spread out their wings to fly—
O, one after one they flew away
Far up to the heavenly blue,
To the better country, the upper day,
And—I wish I was going too.

VII

I pray you, what is the nest to me,
My empty nest?
And what is the shore where I stood to
see
My boat sail down to the west?

SONGS OF SEVEN

Can I call that home where I anchor yet,
Though my good man has sailed?
Can I call that home where my nest
was set,

Now all its hope hath failed?
Nay, but the port where my sailor went,
And the land where my nestlings be:
There is the home where my thoughts are
sent,

The only home for me—

Ah me!

A Cottage in a Chine

We reached the place by night,
And heard the waves breaking:
They came to meet us with candles alight
To show the path we were taking.
A myrtle, trained on the gate, was white
With tufted flowers down shaking.

With head beneath her wing,
A little wren was sleeping—
So near, I had found it an easy thing
To steal her for my keeping
From the myrtle bough that with easy
swing
Across the path was sweeping.

Down rocky steps rough-hewed,
Where cup-mosses flowered,
And under the trees, all twisted and rude,
Wherewith the dell was dowered,
They led us, where deep in its solitude
Lay the cottage, leaf-embowered.

A COTTAGE IN A CHINE

The thatch was all bespread
With climbing passion flowers;
They were wet, and glistened with rain-
drops, shed
That day in genial showers.
"Was never a sweeter nest," we said,
"Than this little nest of ours."

We laid us down to sleep:
But as for me—waking,
I marked the plunge of the muffled deep
On its sandy reaches breaking;
For heart-joyance doth sometimes keep
From slumber, like heart-aching.

And I was glad that night,
With no reason ready,
To give my own heart for its deep delight,
That flowed like some tidal eddy,
Or shone like a star that was rising bright
With comforting radiance steady.

But on a sudden—hark!
Music struck asunder
Those meshes of bliss, and I wept in the
dark,
So sweet was the unseen wonder;
So swiftly it touched, as if struck at a mark,
The trouble that joy kept under.

A COTTAGE IN A CHINE

I rose—the moon outshone:
I saw the sea heaving,
And a little vessel sailing alone,
The small crisp wavelet cleaving;
'Twas she as she sailed to her port un-
known—
Was that track of sweetness leaving.

We know they music made
In heaven, ere man's creation;
But when God threw it down to us that
strayed,
It dropt with lamentation,
And ever since doth its sweetness shade
With sighs for its first station.

Its joy suggests regret—
Its most for more is yearning;
And it brings to the soul that its voice
hath met,
No rest that cadence learning,
But a conscious part in the sighs that fret
Its nature for returning.

O Eve, sweet Eve! methought
When sometimes comfort winning,
As she watched the first children's tender
sport,
Sole joy born since her sinning,

A COTTAGE IN A CHINE

If a bird anear them sang, it brought
The pang as at beginning.

While swam the unshed tear,
Her prattlers little heeding,
Would murmur, "This bird, with its carol
clear,
When the red clay was kneaden,
And God made Adam our father dear,
Sang to him thus in Eden."

The moon went in—the sky
And earth and sea hiding,
I laid me down, with the yearning sigh
Of that strain in my heart abiding;
I slept, and the barque that had sailed so
nigh
In my dream was ever gliding.

I slept, but waked amazed,
With sudden noise frightened,
And voices without, and a flash that dazed
My eyes from candles lighted.
"Ah! surely," methought, "by these shouts
upraised,
Some travellers are benighted."

A voice was at my side—
"Waken, madam, waken!

A COTTAGE IN A CHINE

The long-prayed-for ship at her anchor
doth ride.

Let the child from its rest be taken,
For the captain doth weary for babe and
for bride—

Waken, madam, waken!

“The home you left but late,
He speeds to it light-hearted;
By the wires he sent this news, and straight
To you with it they started.”
O joy for a yearning heart too great,
O union for the parted!

We rose up in the night,
The morning star was shining;
We carried the child in its slumber light
Out by the myrtles twining:
Orion over the sea hung bright,
And glorious in declining.

Mother, to meet her son,
Smiled first, then wept the rather
And wife, to bind up those links undone,
And cherished words to gather,
And to show the face of her little one,
That had never seen its father.

That cottage in a chine,
We were not to behold it;

A COTTAGE IN A CHINE

But there may the purest of sunbeams
shine,
May freshest flowers enfold it,
For sake of the news which our hearts
must twine
With the bower where we were told it!

Now oft, left lone again,
Sit mother and sit daughter,
And bless the good ship that sailed over
the main,
And the favouring winds that brought
her;
While still some new beauty they fable
and feign
For the cottage by the water.

Persephone

WRITTEN FOR "THE
PORTFOLIO SOCIETY",
JANUARY, 1862

Subject given—"Light and Shade"

She stepped upon Sicilian grass,
Demeter's daughter fresh and fair,
A child of light, a radiant lass,
And gamesome as the morning air.
The daffodils were fair to see,
They nodded lightly on the lea,
Persephone—Persephone!

Lo! one she marked of rarer growth
Than orchis or anemone;
For it the maiden left them both,
And parted from her company.
Drawn nigh she deemed it fairer still,
And stooped to gather by the rill
The daffodil, the daffodil.

What ailed the meadow that it shook?
What ailed the air of Sicily?

PERSEPHONE

She wondered by the brattling brook,
And trembled with the trembling lea.
"The coal-black horses rise—they rise:
O mother, mother!" low she cries—
Persephone—Persephone!

"O light, light, light!" she cries, "fare-
well;

The coal-black horses wait for me.
O shade of shades, where I must dwell,
Demeter, mother, far from thee!
Ah, fated doom that I fulfil!
Ah, fateful flower beside the rill!
The daffodil, the daffodil!"

What ails her that she comes not home?

Demeter seeks her far and wide,
And gloomy-browed doth ceaseless roam
From many a morn till eventide.

"My life, immortal though it be,
Is nought," she cries, "for want of
thee,

Persephone—Persephone!

"Meadows of Enna, let the rain
No longer drop to feed your rills,
Nor dew refresh the fields again,
With all their nodding daffodils!

Fade, fade and droop, O lilled lea,

PERSEPHONE

Where thou, dear heart, wert reft from me—
Persephone—Persephone!”

She reigns upon her dusky throne,
’Mid shades of heroes dread to see;
Among the dead she breathes alone,
Persephone—Persephone!
Or seated on the Elysian hill
She dreams of earthly daylight still,
And murmurs of the daffodil.

A voice in Hades soundeth clear,
The shadows mourn and flit below;
It cries—“Thou Lord of Hades, hear,
And let Demeter’s daughter go.
The tender corn upon the lea
Droops in her goddess gloom when she
Cries for her lost Persephone.

“From land to land she raging flies,
The green fruit falleth in her wake,
And harvest fields beneath her eyes
To earth the grain unripened shake.
Arise, and set the maiden free;
Why should the world such sorrow dree
By reason of Persephone?”

He takes the cleft pomegranate seeds:
“Love, eat with me this parting day;”

PERSEPHONE

Then bids them fetch the coal-black
steeds—

“Demeter’s daughter, wouldst away?”
The gates of Hades set her free;
“She will return full soon,” saith he—
“My wife, my wife Persephone.”

Low laughs the dark king on his throne—
“I gave her of pomegranate seeds.”
Demeter’s daughter stands alone
Upon the fair Eleusian meads.
Her mother meets her. “Hail!” saith she;
“And doth our daylight dazzle thee,
My love, my child Persephone?”

“What moved thee, daughter, to forsake
Thy fellow-maids that fatal morn,
And give thy dark lord power to take
Thee living to his realm forlorn?”
Her lips reply without her will.
As one addressed who slumbereth still—
“The daffodil, the daffodil!”

Her eyelids droop with light oppressed,
And sunny wafts that round her stir,
Her cheek upon her mother’s breast—
Demeter’s kisses comfort her.
Calm Queen of Hades, art thou she
Who stepped so lightly on the lea—
Persephone, Persephone?

PERSEPHONE

When, in her destined course, the moon
Meets the deep shadow of this world,
And labouring on doth seem to swoon
Through awful wastes of dinness
whirled—

Emerged at length, no trace hath she
Of that dark hour of destiny,
Still silvery sweet—Persephone.

The greater world may near the less,
And draw it through her weltering shade,
But not one biding trace impress
Of all the darkness that she made;
The greater soul that draweth thee
Hath left his shadow plain to see
On thy fair face, Persephone!

Demeter sighs, but sure 'tis well
The wife should love her destiny:
They part, and yet, as legends tell,
She mourns her lost Persephone;
While chant the maids of Enna still—
“O fateful flower beside the rill—
The daffodil, the daffodil!”

A Sea Song

Old Albion sat on a crag of late,
And sung out—"Ahoy! ahoy!
Long life to the captain, good luck to the
mate,
And this to my sailor boy!
Come over, come home,
Through the salt sea foam,
My sailor, my sailor boy.

"Here's a crown to be given away, I ween
A crown for my sailor's head,
And all for the worth of a widowed queen,
And the love of the noble dead,
And the fear and fame
Of the island's name
Where my boy was born and bred.

"Content thee, content thee, let it alone,
Thou marked for a choice so rare;
Though treaties be treaties, never a throne
Was proffered for cause as fair.
Yet come to me home,
Through the salt sea foam,
For the Greek must ask elsewhere.

A SEA SONG

"'Tis pity, my sailor, but who can tell?
Many lands they look to me;
One of these might be wanting a Prince
as well,
But that's as hereafter may be."
She raised her white head
And laughed; and she said
"That's as hereafter may be."

Brothers, and a Sermon

It was a village built in a green rent,
Between two cliffs that skirt the dangerous bay.

A reef of level rock runs out to sea,
And you may lie on it and look sheer down,
Just where the "Grace of Sunderland" was
lost,

And see the elastic banners of the dulse
Rock softly, and the orange star-fish creep
Across the laver, and the mackerel shoot
Over and under it, like silver boats
Turning at will and plying under water.

There on that reef we lay upon our breasts,
My brother and I, and half the village lads,
For an old fisherman had called to us
With "Sirs, the syle be come." "And
what are they?"

My brother said. "Good lack!" the old
man cried,

and shook his head; "to think you gentle-
folk

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Should ask what syle be! Look you; I
can't say
What syle be called in your fine diction-
aries
Nor what name God Almighty calls them
by
When their food's ready and He sends
them south;
But our folk call them syle, and nought
but syle,
And when they're grown, why then we
call them herring.

I tell you, Sir, the water is as full
Of them as pastures be of blades of grass;
You'll draw a score out in a landing net,
And none of them be longer than a pin.

"Syle! ay, indeed, we should be badly off,
I reckon, and so would God Almighty's
gulls,"

He grumbled on in his quaint piety,
"And all his other birds, if He should say
I will not drive my syle into the south;
The fisher folk may do without my syle,
And do without the shoals of fish it
To follow and feed on it."

This said, we made
Our peace with him by means of two small
coins,

And down we ran and lay upon the reef,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

And saw the swimming infants, emerald
green,

In separate shoals, the scarcely turning
ebb

Bringing them in; while sleek, and not
intent

On chase, but taking that which came to
hand,

The full-fed mackerel and the gurnet swam
Between; and settling on the polished sea,
A thousand snow-white gulls sat lovingly
In social rings, and twittered while they
fed.

The village dogs and ours, elate and brave,
Lay looking over, barking at the fish;
Fast, fast the silver creatures took the bait,
And when they heaved and floundered on
the rock,

In beauteous misery, a sudden pat
Some shaggy pup would deal, then back
away,

At distance eye them with sagacious doubt,
And shrink half frightened from the slippery
things.

And so we lay from ebb-tide, till the flow
Rose high enough to drive us from the
reef;

The fisher lads went home across the
sand;

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

We climbed the cliff, and sat an hour or more,

Talking and looking down. It was not talk

Of much significance, except for this—

That we had more in common than of old,

For both were tired, I with overwork,

He with inaction; I was glad at heart

To rest, and he was glad to have an ear

That he could grumble to, and half in jest

Rail at entails, deplore the fate of heirs,

And the misfortune of a good estate—

Misfortune that was sure to pull him down,

Make him a dreamy, selfish, useless man:

Indeed he felt himself deteriorate

Already. Thereupon he sent down showers

Of clattering stones, to emphasize his words

And leap the cliffs and tumble noisily

Into the seething wave. And as for me

I railed at him and at ingratitude,

While rifling of the basket he had slung

Across his shoulders; then with right

good will

We fell to work and feasted like the gods,

Like labourers, or like eager workhouse folk

At Yuletide dinner; or, to say the whole

At once, like tired, hungry, healthy youth,

Until the meal being o'er, the tilted flask

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Drained of its latest drop, the meat and
bread

And ruddy cherries eaten, and the dogs
Mumbling the bones, this elder brother
of mine—

This man, that never felt an ache or pain
In his broad, well-knit frame, and never
knew

The trouble of an unforgiven grudge,
The sting of a regretted meanness, nor
The desperate struggle of the unendowed
For place and for possession—he began
To sing a rhyme that he himself had
wrought;

Sending it out with cogitative pause,
As if the scene where he had shaped it
first

Had rolled it back on him, and meeting it
Thus unaware, he was of doubtful mind
Whether his dignity it well beseemed
To sing of pretty maiden:

Goldilocks sat on the grass,
Tying up of posies rare;
Hardly could a sunbeam pass
Through the cloud that was her hair.
Purple orchis lasteth long,
Primrose flowers are pale and clear;
O the maiden sang a song
It would do you good to hear!

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Sad before her leaned the boy,
 "Goldilocks that I love well,
Happy creature fair and coy,
 Think o' me, Sweet Amabel."
Goldilocks she shook apart,
 Looked with doubtful, doubtful eyes;
Like a blossom in her heart
 Opened out her first surprise.

As a gloriole sign o' grace,
 Goldilocks, ah fall and flow,
On the blooming, childlike face,
 Dimple, dimple, come and go.
Give her time; on grass and sky
 Let her gaze if she be fain:
As they looked ere he drew nigh,
 They will never look again.

Ah! the playtime she has known,
 While her goldilocks grew long,
Is it like a nestling flown,
 Childhood over like a song?
Yes, the boy may clear his brow,
 Though she thinks to say him nay,
When she sighs, "I cannot now—
 Come again some other day."

"Hold! there," he cried, half angry with
 himself;
"That ending goes amiss": then turned
 again

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

To the old argument that we had held—
“Now look you!” said my brother, “you
may talk

Till, weary of the talk, I answer ‘Ay,
There’s reason in your words;’ and you
may talk

Till I go on to say, ‘This should be so;’
And you may talk till I shall further own
‘It is so; yes, I am a lucky dog!’

Yet not the less shall I next morning
wake,

And with a natural and fervent sigh,
Such as you never heaved, I shall exclaim
‘What an unlucky dog I am!’” And
here

He broke into a laugh. “But as for
you—

You! on all hands you have the best of
me;

Men have not robbed you of your birth-
right—work,

Nor ravaged in old days a peaceful field,
Nor wedded heiresses against their will,
Nor sinned, nor slaved, nor stooped, nor
overreached

That you might drone a useless life away
‘Mid half a score of bleak and barren
farms

And half a dozen bogs.”

“O rare!” I cried;

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

“His wrongs go nigh to make him eloquent:

Now we behold how far bad actions reach!
Because five hundred years ago a Knight
Drove geese and beeves out of a Franklin's yard;

Because three hundred years ago a squire—

Against her will, and for her fair estate—
Married a very ugly, red-haired maid,
The blest inheritor of all their pelf,
While in the full enjoyment of the same,
Sighs on his own confession every day.
He cracks no egg without a moral sigh,
Nor eats of beef but thinking on that wrong;

Then, yet the more to be revenged on them,

And shame their ancient pride, if they should know,

Works hard as any horse for his degree,
And takes to writing verses.”

“Ay,” he said,
Half laughing at himself. “Yet you and I,

But for those tresses which enrich us yet
With somewhat of the hue that partial fame

Calls auburn when it shines on heads of heirs,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

But when it flames round brows of
younger sons,

Just red—mere red; why, but for this, I say,
And but for selfish getting of the land,
And beggarly entailing it, we two,
To-day well fed, well grown, well dressed,
well read,

We might have been two horny-handed
boors—

Lean, clumsy, ignorant, and ragged
boors—

Planning for moonlight nights a poaching
scheme,

Or soiling our dull souls and consciences
With plans for pilfering a cottage roost.

“What, chorus! are you dumb? you
should have cried,

‘So good comes out of evil;’” and with
that,

As if all pauses it was natural

To seize for songs, his voice broke out
again:

Coo, dove, to thy married mate—

She has two warm eggs in her nest:

Tell her the hours are few to wait

Ere life shall dawn on their rest;

And thy young shall peck at the shells, elate

With a dream of her brooding breast.

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Coo, dove, for she counts the hours,
Her fair wings ache for flight:
By day the apple has grown in the flowers,
And the moon has grown by night,
And the white drift settled from hawthorn
bowers,
Yet they will not seek the light.

Coo, dove; but what of the sky?
And what if the storm-wind swell,
And the reeling branch come down from on
high
To the grass where daisies dwell,
And the brood beloved should with them lie
Or ever they break the shell?

Coo, dove; and yet black clouds lower,
Like fate, on the far-off sea:
Thunder and wind they bear to thy bower,
As on wings of destiny.
Ah, what if they break in an evil hour,
As they broke over mine and me?

What next?—we started like to girls, for
lo!
The creaking voice, more harsh than rusty
crane,
Of one who stooped behind us, cried
aloud,
“Good lack! how sweet the gentleman
does sing—

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

So loud and sweet, 'tis like to split his
throat.

Why, Mike's a child to him, a two-years'
child—

A Chrisom child."

"Who's Mike?" my brother growled
A little roughly. Quoth the fisherman—

"Mike, Sir? he's just a fisher lad, no
more;

But he can sing, when he takes on to
sing,

So loud there's not a sparrow in the spire
But needs must hear. Sir, if I might
make bold,

I'd ask what song that was you sung.
My mate,

As we were shoving off the mackerel boats,
Said he, 'I'll wager that's the sort o' song
They kept their hearts up with in the
Crimea.'"

"There, fisherman," quoth I, "he showed
his wit,

Your mate; he marked the sound of sa-
vage war—

Gunpowder, groans, hot-shot, and burst-
ing shells,

And 'murderous messages' delivered by
Spent balls that break the heads of
dreaming men."

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

"Ay, ay, Sir!" quoth the fisherman.

"Have done!"

My brother. And I—"The gift belongs
to few

Of sending farther than the words can
reach

Their spirit and expression;" still—"Have
done!"

He cried; and then, "I rolled the rubbish
out

More loudly than the meaning warranted,
To air my lungs—I thought not on the
words."

Then said the fisherman, who missed the
point,

"So Mike rolls out the psalm; you'll
hear him, Sir,

Please God you live till Sunday."

"Even so:

And you, too, fisherman; for here, they say,
You all are church-goers."

"Surely, Sir," quoth he,

Took off his hat, and stroked his old
white head

And wrinkled face; then sitting by us
said,

As one that utters with a quiet mind
Unchallenged truth—"Tis lucky for the
boats."

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

The boats! 'tis lucky for the boats! Our
eyes

Were drawn to him as either fain would
say,

What! do they send the psalm up in the
spire

And pray because 'tis lucky for the boats?

But he, the brown old man, the wrinkled
man,

That all his life had been a church-goer,
Familiar with celestial cadences,

Informed of all he could receive, and sure
Of all he understood—he sat content,

And we kept silence. In his reverend
face

There was a simpleness we could not
sound;

Much truth had passed him overhead;
some error

He had trod under foot;—God comfort
him!

He could not learn of us, for we were
young

And he was old, and so we gave it up;

And the sun went into the west, and down

Upon the water stooped an orange cloud,

And the pale milky reaches flushed, as
glad

To wear its colours; and the sultry air

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Went out to sea, and puffed the sails of
ships
With thymy wafts, the breath of trodden
grass:

It took moreover music, for across
The heather belt and over pasture land
Came the sweet monotone of one slow bell,
And parted time into divisions rare,
Whereof each morsel brought its own de-
light.

"They ring for service," quoth the fisher-
man;

"Our parson preaches in the church to-
night."

"And do the people go?" my brother
asked.

"Ay, Sir; they count it mean to stay
away,
He takes it so to heart. He's a rare man,
Our parson; half a head above us all."

"That's a great gift, and notable," said I.

"Ay, Sir; and when he was a younger
man

He went out in the lifeboat very oft,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Before the 'Grace of Sunderland' was
wrecked.

He's never been his own man since that
hour;

For there were thirty men aboard of her,
Anigh as close as you are now to me,
And ne'er a one was saved.

"They're lying now,
With two small children, in a row: the
church

And yard are full of seamen's graves, and
few

Have any names.

"She bumped upon the reef;
Our parson, my young son, and several
more

Were lashed together with a two-inch
rope,

And crept along to her; their mates ashore
Ready to haul them in. The gale was
high,

The sea was all a boiling seething froth,
And God Almighty's guns were going
off,

And the land trembled.

"When she took the ground,
She went to pieces like a lock of hay
Tossed from a pitchfork. Ere it came to
that,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

The captain reeled on deck with two
small things,
One in each arm—his little lad and
lass.
Their hair was long, and blew before his
face,
Or else we thought he had been saved;
he fell,
But held them fast. The crew, poor
luckless souls!
The breakers licked them off; and some
were crushed,
Some swallowed in the yeast, some flung
up dead,
The dear breath beaten out of them: not
one
Jumped from the wreck upon the reef to
catch
The hands that strained to reach, but
tumbled back
With eyes wide open. But the captain
lay
And clung—the only man alive. They
prayed—
'For God's sake, captain, throw the
children here!'
'Throw them!' our parson cried; and
then she struck:
And he threw one, a pretty two-years
child;

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

But the gale dashed him on the slippery
verge,
And down he went. They say they heard
him cry.

"Then he rose up and took the other one,
And all our men reached out their hungry
arms,
And cried out, 'Throw her, throw her!'
and he did:
He threw her right against the parson's
breast,
And all at once a sea broke over them,
And they that saw it from the shore have
said
It struck the wreck and piecemeal scat-
tered it,
Just as a woman might the lump of salt
That 'twixt her hands into the kneading-
pan
She breaks and crumbles on her rising
bread.

"We hauled our men in: two of them
were dead—
The sea had beaten them, their heads
hung down;
Our parson's arms were empty, for the
wave
Had torn away the pretty, pretty lamb;

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

We often see him stand beside her grave:
But 't was no fault of his, no fault of his.

"I ask your pardon, Sirs; I prate and
prate,
And never have I said what brought me
here.
Sirs, if you want a boat to-morrow morn,
I'm bold to say there's ne'er a boat like
mine."

"Ay, that was what we wanted," we re-
plied;
"A boat, his boat;" and off he went, well
pleased.

We, too, rose up (the crimson in the sky
Flushing our faces), and went sauntering
on,
And thought to reach our lodging, by
the cliff.
And up and down among the heather beds,
And up and down between the sheaves,
we sped,
Doubling and winding; for a long ravine
Ran up into the land and cut us off,
Pushing out slippery ledges for the birds,
And rent with many a crevice, where the
wind

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Had laid up drifts of empty eggshells,
swept
From the bare berths of gulls and guillemots.

So as it chanced we lighted on a path
That led into a nutwood; and our talk
Was louder than beseemed, if we had
known,

With argument and laughter; for the
path,

As we sped onward, took a sudden turn
Abrupt, and we came out on churchyard
grass,

And close upon a porch, and face to face
With those within, and with the thirty
graves.

We heard the voice of one who preached
within,

And stopped. "Come on," my brother
whispered me;

"It were more decent that we enter now;
Come on! we'll hear this rare old demigod:

I like strong men and large; I like grey
heads,

And grand 'gruff voices, hoarse though
this may be

With shouting in the storm."

It was not hoarse,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

The voice that preached to those few
fishermen
And women, nursing mothers with the
babes
Hushed on their breasts; and yet it held
them not:
Their drowsy eyes were drawn to look at
us,
Till, having leaned our rods against the
wall,
And left the dogs at watch, we entered, sat,
And were apprised that, though he saw
us not,
The parson knew that he had lost the
eyes
And ears of those before him, for he made
A pause—a long dead pause—and dropped
his arms,
And stood awaiting, till I felt the red
Mount to my brow.

And a soft fluttering stir
Passed over all, and every mother hushed
The babe beneath her shawl, and he
turned round
And met our eyes, unused to diffidence,
But diffident of his; then with a sigh
Fronted the folk, lifted his grand grey
head,
And said, as one that pondered now the
words

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

He had been preaching on with new surprise,

And found fresh marvel in their sound,
"Behold!

Behold! saith He, I stand at the door
and knock."

Then said the parson: "What! and shall
He wait,

And must He wait, not only till we say,
'Good Lord, the house is clean, the hearth
is swept,

The children sleep, the mackerel boats
are in,

And all the nets are mended; therefore I
Will slowly to the door and open it:'

But must He also wait where still, behold!

He stands and knocks, while we do say,
'Good Lord,

The gentlefolk are come to worship here,
And I will up and open to Thee soon;

But first I pray a little longer wait,

For I am taken up with them; my eyes
Must needs regard the fashion of their
clothes,

And count the gains I think to make by
them;

Forsooth, they are of much account, good
Lord!

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Therefore have patience with me—wait,
dear Lord!

Or come again?’

“What! must He wait for THIS—
For this? Ay, He doth wait for this, and
still,

Waiting for this, He, patient, railleth not;
Waiting for this, e’en this He saith,
‘Behold!

I stand at the door and knock.’

“O patient hand!
Knocking and waiting—knocking in the
night

When work is done! I charge you, by
the sea

Whereby you fill your children’s mouths,
and by

The might of Him that made it—fisher-
men!

I charge you, mothers! by the mother’s
milk

He drew, and by His Father, God over all,
Blessèd for ever, that ye answer Him!

Open the door with shame, if ye have
sinned;

If ye be sorry, open it with sighs.

Albeit the place be bare for poverty,

And comfortless for lack of plenishing,

Be not abashed for that, but open it,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

And take Him in that comes to sup with
thee;

'Behold!' He saith, 'I stand at the door
and knock.'

"Now, hear me: there be troubles in this
world

That no man can escape, and there is
one

That lieth hard and heavy on my soul,
Concerning that which is to come:—

"I say
As a man that knows what earthly
trouble means,

I will not bear this ONE—I cannot bear
This ONE—I cannot bear the weight of
you—

You—every one of you, body and soul;
You, with the care you suffer, and the
loss

That you sustain; you, with the growing
up

To peril, maybe with the growing old
To want, unless before I stand with you
At the great white throne, I may be free
of all,

And utter to the full what shall discharge
Mine obligation: nay, I will not wait
A day, for every time the black clouds
rise,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

And the gale freshens, still I search my
soul
To find if there be aught that can per-
suade
To good, or aught forsooth that can
beguile
From evil, that I (miserable man!
If that be so) have left unsaid, undone.

“So that when any risen from sunken
wrecks,
Or rolled in by the billows to the edge
Of the everlasting strand, what time the
sea
Gives up her dead, shall meet me, they
may say
Never, ‘Old man, you told us not of this;
You left us fisher-lads that had to toil
Ever in danger of the secret stab
Of rocks, far deadlier than the dagger;
winds
Of breath more murderous than the can-
non’s; waves
Mighty to rock us to our death; and gulfs
Ready beneath to suck and swallow us in:
This crime be on your head; and as for
us—
What shall we do?’ but rather—nay,
not so,
I will not think it; I will leave the dead,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Appealing but to life: I am afraid
Of you, but not so much if you have
sinned

As for the doubt if sin shall be forgiven.
The day was, I have been afraid of
pride—

Hard man's hard pride; but now I am
afraid

Of man's humility. I counsel you,
By the great God's great humbleness,
and by

His pity, be not humble over-much.
See! I will show at whose unopened
doors

He stands and knocks, that you may
never say,

'I am too mean, too ignorant, too lost;
He knocks at other doors, but not at
mine.'

"See here! it is the night! it is the
night!

And snow lies thickly, white untrodden
snow,

And the wan moon upon a casement
shines—

A casement crusted o'er with frosted
leaves,

That make her ray less bright along the
floor.

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

A woman sits, with hands upon her
knees,
Poor tired soul! and she has nought
to do,
For there is neither fire nor candle light:
The driftwood ash lies cold upon her
hearth;
The rushlight flickered down an hour
ago;
Her children wail a little in their sleep
For cold and hunger, and, as if that
sound
Was not enough, another comes to her,
Over God's undefiled snow—a song—
Nay, never hang your heads—I say,
a song.

“And doth she curse the alehouse, and
the sots
That drink the night out and their earn-
ings there,
And drink their manly strength and
courage down,
And drink away the little children's bread,
And starve her, starving by the self-same
act
Her tender suckling, that with piteous
eyes
Looks in her face, till scarcely she has
heart

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

To work and earn the scanty bit and
drop

That feed the others?

“Does she curse the song?

I think not, fishermen; I have not
heard

Such women curse. God's curse is curse
enough.

To-morrow she will say a bitter thing,
Pulling her sleeve down lest the bruises
show—

A bitter thing, but meant for an excuse—
‘My master is not worse than many
men:’

But now, ay, now she sitteth dumb and
still;

No food, no comfort, cold and poverty
Bearing her down.

“My heart is sore for her;
How long, how long? When troubles
come of God,

When men are frozen out of work, when
wives

Are sick, when working fathers fail and
die,

When boats go down at sea—then nought
behoves

Like patience; but for troubles wrought
of men

Patience is hard—I tell you it is hard.

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

“O thou poor soul! it is the night—the
night;

Against thy door drifts up the silent snow,
Blocking thy threshold: ‘Fall,’ thou sayest,
‘fall, fall,

Cold snow, and lie and be trod underfoot,
Am not I fallen? Wake up, and pipe,
O wind,

Dull wind, and beat and bluster at my
door:

Merciful wind, sing me a hoarse rough
song,

For there is other music made to-night
That I would fain not hear. Wake, thou
still sea,

Heavily plunge. Shoot on, white waterfall.

O, I could long like thy cold icicles
Freeze, freeze, and hang upon the frosty
clift

And not complain, so I might melt at
last

In the warm summer sun, as thou wilt do!

“‘But woe is me! I think there is no sun;
My sun is sunken, and the night grows
dark:

None care for me. The children cry for
bread,

And I have none, and nought can com-
fort me;

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Even if the heavens were free to such
as I,
It were not much, for death is long to
wait,
And heaven is far to go!

“And speak'st thou thus,
Despairing of the sun that sets to thee,
And of the earthly love that wanes to
thee,
And of the heaven that lieth far from
thee?
Peace, peace, fond fool! One draweth
near thy door
Whose footsteps leave no print across the
snow;
Thy sun has risen with comfort in his
face,
The smile of heaven, to warm thy frozen
heart
And bless with saintly hand. What! is it
long
To wait and far to go? Thou shalt not go;
Behold, across the snow to thee He
comes,
Thy heaven descends, and is it long to
wait?
Thou shalt not wait: ‘This night, this
night,’ He saith,
‘I stand at the door and knock.’

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

"It is enough—can such an one be here—
Yea, here? O God forgive you, fisher-
men!

One! is there only one? But do thou
know,

O woman pale for want, if thou art here,
That on thy lot much thought is spent
in heaven;

And, coveting the heart a hard man broke,
One standeth patient, watching in the
night,

And waiting in the day-time.

"What shall be
If thou wilt answer? He will smile on
thee;

One smile of His shall be enough to
heal

The wound of man's neglect; and He
will sigh,

Pitying the trouble which that sigh shall
cure;

And He will speak—speak in the desolate
night,

In the dark night: 'For me a thorny
crown

Men wove, and nails were driven in my
hands

And feet: there was an earthquake, and
I died;

I died, and am alive for evermore.

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

"I died for thee; for thee I am alive,
And my humanity doth mourn for thee,
For thou art mine; and all thy little
ones,

They, too, are mine, are mine. Behold,
the house

Is dark, but there is brightness where
the sons

Of God are singing, and, behold, the
heart

Is troubled: yet the nations walk in white;
They have forgotten how to weep; and
thou

Shalt also come, and I will foster thee
And satisfy thy soul; and thou shalt warm
Thy trembling life beneath the smile of
God.

A little while—it is a little while—

A little while, and I will comfort thee;

I go away, but I will come again.'

"But hear me yet. There was a poor
old man

Who sat and listened to the raging sea,
And heard it thunder, lunging at the
cliffs

As like to tear them down. He lay at
night;

And 'Lord have mercy on the lads,'
said he,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

'That sailed at noon, though they be
none of mine!
For when the gale gets up, and when
the wind
Flings at the window, when it beats the
roof,
And lulls, and stops, and rouses up
again,
And cuts the crest clean off the plunging
wave,
And scatters it like feathers up the field,
Why, then I think of my two lads: my
lads
That would have worked and never let
me want,
And never let me take the parish pay.
No, none of mine; my lads were drowned
at sea—
My two—before the most of these were
born.
I know how sharp that cuts, since my
poor wife
Walked up and down, and still walked
up and down,
And I walked after, and one could not
hear
A word the other said, for wind and sea
That raged and beat and thundered in the
night—
The awfulest, the longest, lightest night

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

That ever parents had to spend—a moon
That shone like daylight on the breaking
 wave.

Ah me! and other men have lost the'r
 lads,

And other women wiped their poor dead
 mouths,

And got them home and dried them in
 the house,

And seen the driftwood lie along the
 coast,

That was a tidy boat but one day back,
And seen next tide the neighbours gather it
To lay it on their fires.

 “‘Ay, I was strong
And able-bodied—loved my work;—but now
I am a useless hull: ’t is time I sunk;
I am in all men’s way; I trouble them;
I am a trouble to myself: but yet
I feel for mariners of stormy nights,
And feel for wives that watch ashore.

 Ay, ay!

If I had learning I would pray the Lord
To bring them in: but I’m no scholar, no;
Book-learning is a world too hard for me:
But I make bold to say, O Lord, good
 Lord,

I am a broken-down poor man, a fool
To speak to Thee: but in the Book
 ’tis writ,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

As I hear say from others that can read,
How, when Thou camest, Thou didst
love the sea,
And live with fisherfolk, whereby 't is sure
Thou knowest all the peril they go
through,
And all their trouble.

“As for me, good Lord,
I have no boat; I am old, too old—
My lads are drowned; I buried my poor
wife;
My little lasses died so long ago
That mostly I forget what they were
like.

Thou knowest, Lord; they were such little
ones

I know they went to Thee, but I forget
Their faces, though I missed them sore.

“O Lord,
I was a strong man; I have drawn good
food

And made good money out of Thy great
sea:

But yet I cried for them at nights; and
now,

Although I be so old, I miss my lads,
And there be many folk this stormy night
Heavy with fear for theirs. Merciful Lord,
Comfort them; save their honest boys,
their pride,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

And let them hear next ebb the blessedest,
Best sound—the boat keels grating on the
sand.

“‘I cannot pray with finer words: I know
Nothing; I have no learning, cannot
learn—

Too old, too old. They say I want for
nought,

I have the parish pay; but I am dull
Of hearing, and the fire scarce warms
me through.

God save me—I have been a sinful man—
And save the lives of them that still can
work,

For they are good to me; ay, good to
me.

But, Lord, I am a trouble! and I sit,
And I am lonesome, and the nights are
few

That any think to come and draw a
chair,

And sit in my poor place and talk awhile.
Why should they come, forsooth? Only
the wind

Knocks at my door, O long and loud it
knocks,

The only thing God made that has a
mind

To enter in.’

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

"Yea, thus the old man spake:
These were the last words of his aged
mouth—

BUT ONE DID KNOCK. One came to sup
with him,

That humble, weak old man; knocked at
his door

In the rough pauses of the labouring
wind.

I tell you that One knocked while it was
dark,

Save where their foaming passion had
made white

Those livid seething billows. What He
said

In that poor place where He did talk
awhile,

I cannot tell: but this I am assured,
That when the neighbours came the
morrow morn,

What time the wind had bated, and the sun
Shone on the old man's floor, they saw
the smile

He passed away in, and they said, 'He
looks

As he had woke and seen the face of
Christ,

And with that rapturous smile held out
his arms

To come to Him !'

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

“Can such an one be here,
So old, so weak, so ignorant, so frail?
The Lord be good to thee, thou poor
old man;
It would be hard with thee if heaven
were shut
To such as have not learning! Nay, nay,
nay,
He condescends to them of low estate;
To such as are despised He cometh
down,
Stands at the door and knocks.

“Yet bear with me.
I have a message; I have more to say.
Shall sorrow win his pity, and not sin—
That burden ten times heavier to be
borne?
What think you? Shall the virtuous have
His care
Alone? O virtuous women, think not
scorn,
For you may lift your faces everywhere;
And now that it grows dusk, and I can
see
None though they front me straight, I
fain would tell
A certain thing to you. I say to *you*;
And if it doth concern you, as methinks
It doth, then surely it concerneth all.

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

I say that there was once—I say not
here—

I say that there was once a castaway,
And she was weeping, weeping bitterly;
Kneeling, and crying with a heart-sick
cry

That choked itself in sobs—‘O my good
name!

O my good name!’ And none did hear
her cry!

Nay; and it lightened, and the storm-
bolts fell,

And the rain splashed upon the roof, and
still

She, storm-tost as the storming ele-
ments—

She cried with an exceeding bitter cry,
‘O my good name!’ And then the
thunder-cloud

Stooped low and burst in darkness over-
head,

And rolled, and rocked her on her knees,
and shook

The frail foundations of her dwelling-
place.

But she—if any neighbour had come in,
(None did): if any neighbours had come
in,

They might have seen her crying on her
knees,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

And sobbing 'Lost, lost, lost!' beating
her breast—
Her breast for ever pricked with cruel
thorns,
The wounds whereof could neither balm
assuage
Nor any patience heal—beating her brow,
Which ached, it had been bent so long
to hide
From level eyes, whose meaning was
contempt.

"O ye good women, it is hard to leave
The paths of virtue, and return again.
What if this sinner wept, and none of
you
Comforted her? And what if she did
strive
To mend, and none of you believed her
strife,
Nor looked upon her? Mark, I do not
say,
Though it was hard, you therefore were
to blame
That she had aught against you, though
your feet
Never drew near her door. But I be-
seech
Your patience. Once in old Jerusalem
A woman kneeled at consecrated feet,

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

Kissed them, and washed them with her
tears.

“What then?

I think that yet our Lord is pitiful:
I think I see the castaway e'en now!
And she is not alone: the heavy rain
Splashes without, and sullen thunder rolls,
But she is lying at the sacred feet
Of One transfigured.

“And her tears flow down,
Down to her lips—her lips that kiss the
print

Of nails; and love is like to break her
heart!

Love and repentance—for it still doth
work

Sore in her soul to think, to think that
she,

Even she, did pierce the sacred, sacred
feet,

And bruise the thorn-crowned head.

“O Lord, our Lord,
How great is Thy compassion! Come,
good Lord,

For we will open. Come this night, good
Lord;

Stand at the door and knock.

“And is this all?—
Trouble, old age and simpleness, and
sin—

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

This all? It might be all some other
night;

But this night, if a voice said 'Give
account

Whom hast thou with thee?' then must
I reply,

'Young manhood have I, beautiful youth
and strength,

Rich with all treasure drawn up from the
crypt

Where lies the learning of the ancient
world—

Brave with all thoughts that poets fling
upon

The strand of life, as driftweed after
storms:

Doubtless familiar with Thy mountain
heads,

And the dread purity of Alpine snows,

Doubtless familiar with Thy works con-
cealed

For ages from mankind—outlying worlds,

And many moonèd spheres—and Thy
great store

Of stars, more thick than mealy dust
which here

Powders the pale leaves of Auriculas.

“‘This do I know, but, Lord, I know not
more.

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

“ ‘Not more concerning them—concerning
Thee,
I know Thy bounty; where Thou givest
much
Standing without, if any call Thee in
Thou givest more.’ Speak, then, O rich
and strong:
Open, O happy young, ere yet the hand
Of him that knocks, wearied at last,
forbear;
The patient foot its thankless quest re-
frain,
The wounded heart forevermore with-
draw.”

I have heard many speak, but this one
man—
So anxious not to go to heaven alone—
This one man I remember, and his look,
Till twilight overshadowed him. He
ceased,
And out in darkness with the fisher folk
We passed and stumbled over mounds of
moss,
And heard, but did not see, the passing
beck.
Ah, graceless heart, would that it could
regain
From the dim storehouse of sensations
past

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON

The impress full of tender awe, that
night,
Which fell on me! It was as if the
Christ
Had been drawn down from heaven to
track us home,
And any of the footsteps following us
Might have been His.

A Wedding Song

Come up the broad river, the Thames,
my Dane,

My Dane with the beautiful eyes!
Thousands and thousands await thee full
fain,

And talk of the wind and the skies.
Fear not from folk and from country to
part,

O, I swear it is wisely done:
For (I said) I will bear me by thee, sweet-
heart,

As becometh my father's son.

Great London was shouting as I went
down.

"She is worthy," I said, "of this;
What shall I give who have promised a
crown?

O, first I will give her a kiss."
So I kissed her and brought her, my
Dane, my Dane,

Through the waving wonderful crowd:

A WEDDING SONG

Thousands and thousands, they shouted
 amain,
Like mighty thunders and loud.

And they said, "He is young, the lad we
 love,

The heir of the Isles is young:
How we deem of his mother, and one
 gone above,

Can neither be said nor sung.
He brings us a pledge—he will do his part
 With the best of his race and name;"—
And I will, for I look to live, sweetheart,
 As may suit with my mother's fame.

The Four Bridges

I love this grey old church, the low, long
nave,

The ivied chancel and the slender spire;
No less its shadow on each heaving grave,
With growing osier bound, or living
briar;

I love those yew-tree trunks, where stand
arrayed

So many deep-cut names of youth and
maid.

A simple custom this—I love it well—

A carved betrothal and a pledge of truth;
How many an eve, their linkèd names to
spell,

Beneath the yew-trees sat our village
youth!

When work was over, and the new-cut
hay

Sent wafts of balm from meadows where
it lay.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Ah! many an eve, while I was yet a boy,
Some village hind has beckoned me
aside,
And sought mine aid, with shy and awkward joy,
To carve the letters of his rustic bride,
And make them clear to read as graven
stone,
Deep in the yew-tree's trunk beside his
own.

For none could carve like me, and here
they stand,
Fathers and mothers of this present race;
And underscored by some less practised
hand,
That fain the story of its line would
trace,
With children's names, and number, and
the day
When any called to God have passed
away.

I look upon them, and I turn aside,
As oft when carving them I did ere-
while,
And there I see those wooden bridges wide
That cross the marshy hollow; there
the stile

THE FOUR BRIDGES

In reeds imbedded, and the swelling down,
And the white road toward the distant
town.

But those old bridges claim another look.
Our brattling river tumbles through the
one;
The second spans a shallow, weedy brook;
Beneath the others, and beneath the sun,
Lie two long stilly pools, and on their
breasts
Picture their wooden piles, encased in
swallows' nests.

And round about them grows a fringe of
reeds,
And then a floating crown of lily flowers,
And yet within small silver-budded weeds;
But each clear centre evermore em-
bowers
A deeper sky, where, stooping, you may
see
The little minnows darting restlessly.

My heart is bitter, lilies, at your sweet;
Why did the dewdrop fringe your
chalices?
Why in your beauty are you thus com-
plete,
You silver ships—you floating palaces?

THE FOUR BRIDGES

O! if need be, you must allure man's
eye,

Yet wherefore blossom here? O why? O
why?

O! O! the world is wide, you lily flowers,
It hath warm forests, cleft by still
pools,

Where every night bathe crowds of stars;
and bowers

Of spicery hang over. Sweet air cools
And shakes the lilies among those stars
that lie:

Why are not ye content to reign there?
Why?

That chain of bridges, it were hard to tell
How it is linked with all my early joy.
There was a little foot that I loved well,
It danced across them when I was a
boy;

There was a careless voice that used to
sing;

There was a child, a sweet and happy
thing.

Oft through that matted wood of oak and
birch

She came from yonder house upon the
hill;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

She crossed the wooden bridges to the
church,

And watched, with village girls, my
boasted skill :

But loved to watch the floating lilies best,
Or linger, peering in a swallow's nest;

Linger and linger, with her wistful eyes
Drawn to the lily-buds that lay so white
And soft on crimson water; for the skies
Would crimson, and the little cloudlets
bright

Would all be flung among the flowers
sheer down,

To flush the spaces of their clustering crown.

Till the green rushes—O, so glossy green—
The rushes, they would whisper, rustle,
shake;

And forth on floating gauze, no jewelled
queen

So rich, the green-eyed dragon-flies
would break,

And hover on the flowers—aërial things,
With little rainbows flickering on their
wings.

Ah! my heart dear! the polished pools lie
still,

Like lanes of water reddened by the west,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Till, swooping down from yon o'erhang-
ing hill,
The bold marsh harrier wets her tawny
breast;
We scared her oft in childhood from her
prey,
And the old eager thoughts rise fresh as
yesterday.

To yonder copse by moonlight I did go,
In luxury of mischief, half afraid,
To steal the great owl's brood, her downy
snow,
Her screaming imps to seize, the while
she preyed
With yellow, cruel eyes, whose radiant
glare,
Fell with their mother rage, I might not
dare.

Panting I lay till her great fanning wings
Troubled the dreams of rock-doves,
slumbering nigh,
And she and her fierce mate, like evil
things,
Skimmed the dusk fields; then rising,
with a cry
Of fear, joy, triumph, darted on my prey,
And tore it from the nest and fled away.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

But afterward, belated in the wood,
I saw her moping on the rifled tree,
And my heart smote me for her, while I
stood

Awakened from my careless reverie;
So white she looked, with moonlight
round her shed,
So motherlike she drooped and hung her
head.

O that mine eyes would cheat me! I
behold

The godwits running by the water edge,
The mossy bridges mirrored as of old;
The little curlews creeping from the
sedge,

But not the little foot so gaily light:
O that mine eyes would cheat me, that I
might!—

Would cheat me! I behold the gable ends—
Those purple pigeons clustering on the
cote;

The lane with maples overhung, that bends
Toward her dwelling; the dry grassy
moat,

Thick mullions, diamond latticed, mossed
and grey,
And walls banked up with laurel and with
bay.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

And up behind them yellow fields of corn,
And still ascending countless firry spires,
Dry slopes of hills uncultured, bare, forlorn,

And green in rocky clefts with whins
and briars

Then rich cloud masses dyed the violet's
hue,

With orange sunbeams dropping swiftly
through.

Ay, I behold all this full easily;

My soul is jealous of my happier eyes,
And manhood envies youth. Ah, strange
to see,

By looking merely, orange-flooded skies;
Nay, any dewdrop that may near me
shine:

But never more the face of Eglantine!

She was my one companion, being herself

The jewel and adornment of my days,
My life's completeness. O, a smiling elf,

That I do but disparage with my praise—
My playmate; and I loved her dearly and
long,

And she loved me, as the tender love the
strong.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Ay, but she grew, till on a time there
came

A sudden restless yearning to my heart;
And as we went a-nesting, all for shame
And shyness, I did hold my peace, and
start;

Content departed, comfort shut me out,
And there was nothing left to talk about.

She had but sixteen years, and as for me,
Four added made my life. This pretty
bird,

This fairy bird that I had cherished—she,
Content, had sung, while I, contented,
heard.

The song had ceased; the bird, with
nature's art,

Had brought a thorn and set it in my heart.

The restless birth of love my soul opprest,
I longed and wrestled for a tranquil day,
And warred with that disquiet in my breast
As one who knows there is a better way;
But, turned against myself, I still in vain
Looked for the ancient calm to come again.

My tired soul could to itself confess
That she deserved a wiser love than
mine;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

To love more truly were to love her less,
And for this truth I still awoke to pine;
I had a dim belief that it would be
A better thing for her, a blessed thing
for me.

Good hast Thou made them--comforters
right sweet;
Good hast Thou made the world, to
mankind lent;
Good are Thy dropping clouds that feed
the wheat;
Good are Thy stars above the firma-
ment.
Take to Thee, take, Thy worship, Thy
renown;
The good which Thou hast made doth
wear Thy crown.

For, O my God, Thy creatures are so
frail,
Thy bountiful creation is so fair,
That, drawn before us like the temple veil,
It hides the Holy Place from thought
and care,
Giving man's eyes instead its sweeping
fold,
Rich as with cherub wings and apples
wrought of gold,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Purple and blue and scarlet—shimmering
bells
And rare pomegranates on its brodered
rim,
Glorious with chain- and fret-work that
the swell
Of incense shakes to music dreamy and
dim,
Till on a day comes loss, that God makes
gain,
And death and darkness rend the veil in
twain.

.

Ah, sweetest! my beloved! each outward
thing
Recalls my youth, and is instinct with
thee;
Brown wood-owls in the dusk, with noise-
less wing,
Float from yon hanger to their haunted
tree,
And hoot full softly. Listening, I regain
A flashing thought of thee with their
remembered strain.

I will not pine—it is the careless brook,
These amber sunbeams slanting down
the vale;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

It is the long tree-shadows, with their look
Of natural peace, that make my heart
to fail:

The peace of nature—No, I will not pine—
But O the contrast 'twixt her face and
mine!

And still I changed—I was a boy no
more;

My heart was large enough to hold my
kind,

And all the world As hath been oft before
With youth, I sought, but I could never
find

Work hard enough to quiet my self-strife,
And use the strength of action-craving life.

She, too, was changed: her bountiful sweet
eyes

Looked out full lovingly on all the world.

O tender as the deeps in yonder skies

Their beaming! but her rosebud lips
were curled

With the soft dimple of a musing smile,
Which kept my gaze, but held me mute
the while.

A cast of bees, a slowly moving wain,
The scent of bean-flowers wafted up a
dell,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Blue pigeons wheeling over fields of grain,
Or bleat of folded lamb, would please
her well;
Or cooing of the early coted dove;—
She sauntering mused of these; I, follow-
ing, mused of love.

With her two lips, that one the other
pressed
So poutingly with such a tranquil air,
With her two eyes, that on my own
would rest
So dream-like, she denied my silent
prayer,
Fronted unuttered words and said them
nay,
And smiled down love till it had nought
to say.

The words that through mine eyes would
clearly shine
Hovered and hovered on my lips in
vain;
If after pause I said but "Eglantine",
She raised to me her quiet eyelids twain,
And looked me this reply—look calm, yet
bland—
"I shall not know, I will not under-
stand."

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Yet she did know my story—knew my
life

Was wrought to hers with bindings
many and strong:

That I, like Israel, served for a wife,
And for the love I bare her thought
not long,

But only a few days, full quickly told,
My seven years' service strict as his of
old.

I must be brief: the twilight shadows
grow,

And steal the rose-bloom genial summer
sheds,

And scented wafts of wind that come and
go

Have lifted dew from honied clover
heads;

The seven stars shine out above the mill,
The dark delightful woods lie veiled
and still.

Hush! hush! the nightingale begins to
sing,

And stops, as ill-contented with her note;
Then breaks from out the bush with
hurried wing,

Restless and passionate. She tunes her
throat,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Laments awhile in wavering trills, and
then
Floods with a stream of sweetness all the
glen.

The seven stars upon the nearest pool
Lie trembling down betwixt the lily
leaves,
And move like glowworms; wafting
breezes cool
Come down along the water, and it
heaves
And bubbles in the sedge; while deep
and wide
The dim night settles on the country side.

I know this scene by heart. O! once be-
fore
I saw the seven stars float to and fro,
And stayed my hurried footsteps by the
shore
To mark the starry picture spread below:
Its silence made the tumult in my breast
More audible; its peace revealed my own
unrest.

I paused, then hurried on; my heart beat
quick;
I crossed the bridges, reached the steep
ascent,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

And climbed through matted fern and
hazels thick;
Then darkling through the close green
maples went
And saw—there felt love's keenest pangs
begin—
An oriel window lighted from within—

I saw—and felt that they were scarcely
cares
Which I had known before; I drew
more near,
And O! methought how sore it frets and
wears
The soul to part with that it holds so
dear;
'Tis hard two woven tendrils to untwine,
And I was come to part with Eglantine.

For life was bitter through those words
repressed,
And youth was burdened with unspoken
vows;
Love unrequited brooded in my breast,
And shrank, at glance, from the be-
loved brows:
And three long months, heart-sick, my
foot withdrawn,
I had not sought her side by rivulet,
copse, or lawn—

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Laments awhile in wavering trills, and
then
Floods with a stream of sweetness all the
glen.

The seven stars upon the nearest pool
Lie trembling down betwixt the lily
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foot withdrawn,

I had not sought her side by rivulet,
copse, or lawn—

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Not sought her side, yet busy' thought no
less

Still followed in her wake, though far
behind;

And I, being parted from her loveliness,
Looked at the picture of her in my
mind:

I lived alone, I walked with soul opprest,
And ever sighed for her, and sighed for
rest.

Then I had risen to struggle with my
heart,

And said—"O heart! the world is fresh
and fair,

And I am young; but this thy restless
smart

Changes to bitterness the morning air:
I will, I must, these weary fetters break—
I will be free, if only for her sake.

"O let me trouble her no more with sighs!
Heart-healing comes by distance, and
with time:

Then let me wander, and enrich mine eyes
With the green forests of a softer clime,
Or list by night at sea the wind's low
stave

And long monotonous rockings of the
wave.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

“Through open solitudes, unbounded
meads,

Where, wading on breast-high in yellow
bloom,

Untamed of man, the shy white llama
feeds—

There would I journey and forget my
doom;

Or far, O far as sunrise I would see
The level prairie stretch away from me!

“Or I would sail upon the tropic seas,
Where fathom long the blood-red dulces
grow,

Droop from the rock and waver in the
breeze,

Lashing the tide to foam; while calm
below

The muddy mandrakes throng those waters
warm,

And purple, gold, and green, the living
blossoms swarm.”

So of my father I did win consent,
With importunities repeated long,
To make that duty which had been my
bent,

To dig with strangers alien tombs
among,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

And bound to them through desert leagues
to pace,
Or track up rivers to their starting-place.

For this I had done battle and had won,
But not alone to tread Arabian sands,
Measure the shadows of a southern sun,
Or dig out gods in the old Egyptian
lands;
But for the dream wherewith I thought
to cope—
The grief of love unmated with love's
hope.

And now I would set reason in array,
Methought, and fight for freedom man-
fully,
Till by long absence there would come a
day
When this my love would not be pain
to me;
But if I knew my rosebud fair and blest
I should not pine to wear it on my breast.

The days fled on; another week should
fling
A foreign shadow on my lengthening
way;
Another week, yet nearness did not bring
A braver heart that hard farewell to say.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

I let the last day wane, the dusk begin,
Ere I had sought that window lighted
from within.

Sinking and sinking, O my heart! my
heart!

Will absence heal thee whom its shade
doth rend?

I reached the little gate, and soft within
The oriel tell her shadow. She did lend
Her loveliness to me, and let me share
The listless sweetness of those features fair.

Among thick laurels in the gathering
gloom,

Heavy for this our parting, I did stand;
Beside her mother in the lighted room,
She sitting leaned her cheek upon her
hand;

And as she read, her sweet voice floating
through

The open casement seemed to mourn me
an adieu.

Youth! youth! how buoyant are thy hopes!
they turn,

Like marigolds, toward the sunny side.
My hopes were buried in a funeral urn,
And they sprung up like plants and
spread them wide;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Though I had schooled and reasoned
them away,
They gathered smiling near and prayed a
holiday.

Ah, sweetest voice! how pensive were its
tones,

And how regretful its unconscious pause!
"Is it for me her heart this sadness owns,
And is our parting of to-night the cause?
Ah, would it might be so!" I thought,
and stood

Listening entranced among the under-
wood.

I thought it would be something worth
the pain

Of parting, to look once in those deep
eyes,

And take from them an answering look
again:

"When eastern palms," I thought,
"about me rise,

If I might carve our names upon the rind,
Betrothed, I would not mourn, though
leaving thee behind."

I can be patient, faithful, and most fond
To unacknowledged love; I can be true

THE FOUR BRIDGES

To this sweet thralldom, this unequal bond,
This yoke of mine that reaches not to
you :

O, how much more could costly parting
buy—

If not a pledge, one kiss, or, failing that,
a sigh!

I listened, and she ceased to read; she
turned

Her face toward the laurels where I
stood :

Her mother spoke—O wonder! hardly
learned;

She said, "There is a rustling in the
wood;

Ah, child! if one draw near to bid fare-
well,

Let not thine eyes an unsought secret tell.

"My daughter, there is nothing held so
dear

As love, if only it be hard to win.

The roses that in yonder hedge appear

Outdo our garden-buds which bloom
within;

But since the hand may pluck them every
day,

Unmarked they bud, bloom, drop, and
drift away.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

"My daughter, my beloved, be not you
Like those same roses." O bewildering
word!

My heart stood still, a mist obscured my
view:

It cleared; still silence. No denial
stirred

The lips beloved; but straight, as one
opprest,

She, kneeling, dropped her face upon her
mother's breast.

This said, "My daughter, sorrow comes
to all;

Our life is checked with shadows manifold:

But woman has this more—she may not
call

Her sorrow by its name. Yet love not
told,

And only born of absence and by thought,
With thought and absence may return to
nought."

And my beloved lifted up her face,

And moved her lips as if about to speak;
She dropped her lashes with a girlish
grace,

And the rich damask mantled in her
cheek:

THE FOUR BRIDGES

I stood awaiting till she should deny
Her love, or with sweet laughter put it
by.

But, closer nestling to her mother's heart,
She, blushing, said no word to break
my trance,
For I was breathless; and, with lips apart,
Felt my breast pant and all my pulses
dance,
And strove to move, but could not for the
weight
Of unbelieving joy, so sudden and so
great,

Because she loved me. With a mighty
sigh
Breaking away, I left her on her knees,
And blest the laurel bower, the darkened
sky,
The sultry night of August. Through
the trees,
Giddy with gladness, to the porch I went,
And hardly found the way for joyful won-
derment.

Yet, when I entered, saw her mother sit
With both hands cherishing the grace-
ful head,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Smoothing the clustered hair, and parting
it

From the fair brow; she, rising, only
said,

In the accustomed tone, the accustomed
word,

The careless greeting that I always heard;

And she resumed her merry, mocking
smile,

Though tear-drops on the glistening
lashes hung.

O woman! thou wert fashioned to be-
guile:

So have all sages said, all poets sung.

She spoke of favouring winds and wait-
ing ships,

With smiles of gratulation on her lips!

And then she looked and faltered: I had
grown

So suddenly in life and soul a man:

She moved her lips, but could not find a
tone

To set her mocking music to; began

One struggle for dominion, raised her
eyes,

And straight withdrew them, bashful
through surprise.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

The colour over cheek and bosom flushed;
I might have heard the beating of her
heart,

But that mine own beat louder; when she
blushed,

The hand within mine own I felt to
start,

But would not change my pitiless decree
To strive with her for might and mastery.

She looked again, as one that, half afraid,
Would fain be certain of a doubtful
thing;

Or one beseeching "Do not me upbraid!"
And then she trembled like the flutter-
ing

Of timid little birds, and silent stood,
No smile wherewith to mock my hardi-
hood.

She turned, and to an open casement
moved

With girlish shyness, mute beneath my
gaze,

And I on downcast lashes unreproved
Could look as long as pleased me;
while, the rays

Of moonlight round her, she her fair
head bent,

In modest silence to my words attent.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

How fast the giddy whirling moments
flew!

The moon had set; I heard the mid-
night chime;

Hope is more brave than fear, and joy
than dread,

And I could wait unmoved the parting
time.

It came; for by a sudden impulse drawn,
She, risen, stepped out upon the dusky
lawn.

A little waxen taper in her hand,
Her feet upon the dry and dewless grass,
She looked like one of the celestial band,
Only that on her cheeks did dawn and
pass

Most human blushes; while, the soft light
thrown

On vesture pure and white, she seemed
yet fairer grown.

Her mother, looking out toward her,
sighed,

Then gave her hand in token of fare-
well,

And with her warning eyes, that seemed
to chide,

Scarce suffered that I sought her child
to tell

THE FOUR BRIDGES

The story of my life, whose every line
No other burden bore than—Eglantine.

Black thunder-clouds were rising up behind,

The waxen taper burned full steadily;
It seemed as if dark midnight had a
mind

To hear what lovers say, and her decree
Had passed for silence, while she, dropped
to ground

With raiment floating wide, drank in the
sound.

O happiness! thou dost not leave a trace
So well defined as sorrow. Amber light,
Shed like a glory on her angel face,

I can remember fully, and the sight
Of her fair forehead and her shining eyes,
And lips that smiled in sweet and girlish
wise.

I can remember how the taper played
Over her small hands and her vesture
white;

How it struck up into the trees, and laid
Upon their under leaves unwonted light;
And when she held it low, how far it
spread

O'er velvet pansies slumbering on their bed.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

I can remember that we spoke full low,
That neither doubted of the other's
truth;
And that with footsteps slower and more
slow,
Hands folded close for love, eyes wet
for ruth:
Beneath the trees, by that clear taper's
flame,
We wandered till the gate of parting came.

But I forget the parting words she said,
So much they thrilled the all-attentive
soul;
For one short moment human heart and
head
May bear such bliss—its present is the
whole:
I had that present, till in whispers fell
With parting gesture her subdued fare-
well.

Farewell! she said, in act to turn away,
But stood a moment still to dry her
tears,
And suffered my enfolding arm to stay
The time of her departure. O ye years
That intervene betwixt that day and this!
You all received your hue from that keen
pain and bliss.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

O mingled pain and bliss! O pain to
break

At once from happiness so lately found,
And four long years to feel for her sweet
sake

The incompleteness of all sight and
sound!

But bliss to cross once more the foaming
brine—

O bliss to come again and make her
mine!

I cannot—O, I cannot more recall!

But I will soothe my troubled thoughts
to rest

With musing over journeyings wide, and
all

Observance of this active-humoured west,
And swarming cities steeped in eastern
day,

With swarthy tribes in gold and striped
array.

I turn from these, and straight there will
succeed

(Shifting and changing at the restless
will),

Imbedded in some deep Circassian mead,
White wagon-tilts, and flocks that eat
their fill

THE FOUR BRIDGES

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THE FOUR BRIDGES

Unseen above, while comely shepherds
pass,
And scarcely show their heads above the
grass.

—The red Sahara in an angry glow,
With amber fogs, across its hollows
trailed
Long strings of camels, gloomy-eyed and
slow,
And women on their necks, from gazers
veiled,
And sun-swart guides who toil across the
sand
To groves of date-trees on the watered land.

Again—the brown sails of an Arab boat,
Flapping by night upon a glassy sea,
Whereon the moon and planets seem to
float,
More bright of hue than they were wont
to be,
While shooting-stars rain down with
crackling sound,
And, thick as swarming locusts, drop to
ground.

Or far into the heat among the sands
The gembok nations, snuffing up the
wind,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Drawn by the scent of water—and the
bands

Of tawny-bearded lions pacing, blind
With the sun-dazzle in their midst, opprest
With prey, and spiritless for lack of rest!

What more? Old Lebanon, the frosty-
browed,

Setting his feet among oil-olive trees,
Heaving his bare brown shoulder through
a cloud;

And after, grassy Carmel, purple seas,
Flattering his dreams and echoing in his
rocks,

Soft as the bleating of his thousand
flocks.

Enough: how vain this thinking to be-
guile,

With recollected scenes, an aching
breast!

Did not I, journeying, muse on her the
while?

Ah, yes! for every landscape comes im-
pressed—

Ay, written on, as by an iron pen—

With the same thought I nursed about
her then.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Therefore let memory turn again to home;
Feel, as of old, the joy of drawing near;
Watch the green breakers and the wind-
tossed foam,
And see the land-fog break, dissolve,
and clear;
Then think a skylark's voice far sweeter
sound
Than ever thrilled but over English
ground;

And walk, glad, even to tears, among
the wheat,
Not doubting this to be the first of lands;
And, while in foreign words this mur-
muring, meet
Some little village schoolgirls (with
their hands
Full of forget-me-nots), who greeting me,
I count their English talk delightful
melody;

And seat me on a bank, and draw them
near,
That I may feast myself with hearing
it,
Till shortly they forget their bashful fear,
Push back their flaxen curls, and round
me sit—

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Tell me their names, their daily tasks,
and show
Where wild wood strawberries in the
copses grow.

So passed the day in this delightful
land:

My heart was thankful for the English
tongue—

For English sky with feathery cloudlets
spanned—

For English hedge with glistening dew-
drops hung.

I journeyed, and at glowing eventide
Stopped at a rustic inn by the wayside.

That night I slumbered sweetly, being
right glad

To miss the flapping of the shrouds;
but lo!

A quiet dream of beings twain I had,
Behind the curtain talking soft and low:
Methought I did not heed their utterance
fine,

Till one of them said softly, "Eglantine."

I started up awake, 'twas silence all:

My own fond heart had shaped that
utterance clear;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

And "Ah!" methought, "how sweetly
did it fall,
Though but in dream, upon the listen-
ing ear!
How sweet from other lips the name well
known—
That name, so many a year heard only
from mine own!"

I thought awhile, then slumber came to
me,
And tangled all my fancy in her maze,
And I was drifting on a raft at sea,
The near all ocean, and the far all
haze;
Through the white polished water sharks
did glide,
And up in heaven I saw no stars to guide.

"Have mercy, God!" but lo! my raft up-
rose;
Drip, drip, I heard the water splash
from it;
My raft had wings, and as the petrel goes,
It skimmed the sea, then brooding
seemed to sit
The milk-white mirror, till, with sudden
spring,
It flew straight upward like a living
thing.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

But strange!—I went not also in that
flight,

For I was entering at a cavern's mouth;
Trees grew within, and screaming birds
of night

Sat on them, hiding from the torrid
south.

On, on I went, while gleaming in the
dark

Those trees with blanchèd leaves stood
pale and stark.

The trees had flower-buds, nourished in
deep night,

And suddenly, as I went farther in,
They opened, and they shot out lambent
light;

Then all at once arose a railing din
That frightened me: "It is the ghosts," I
said,

"And they are railing for their darkness
fled.

"I hope they will not look me in the face;
It frighteth me to hear their laughter
loud;"

I saw them troop before with jaunty pace,
And one would shake off dust that soiled
her shroud:

THE FOUR BRIDGES

But now, O joy unhopèd! to calm my
dread,
Some moonlight filtered through a cleft
o'erhead.

I climbed the lofty trees—the blanchèd
trees—

The cleft was wide enough to let me
through;

I clambered out and felt the balmy breeze,
And stepped on churchyard grasses wet
with dew.

O happy chance! O fortune to admire!
I stood beside my own loved village spire.

And as I gazed upon the yew-tree's trunk,
Lo, far off music—music in the night!
So sweet and tender as it swelled and
sunk;

It charmed me till I wept with keen
delight,

And in my dream, methought as it drew
near

The very clouds in heaven stooped low to
hear.

Beat high, beat low, wild heart so deeply
stirred,

For high as heaven runs up the piercing
strain;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

The restless music fluttering like a bird
Bemoaned herself, and dropped to earth
again,
Heaping up sweetness till I was afraid
That I should die of grief when it did
fade.

And it DID fade; but while with eager ear
I drank its last long echo dying away,
I was aware of footsteps that drew near,
And round the ivied chancel seemed to
stray:

O soft above the hallowed place they trod—
Soft as the fall of foot that is not shod!

I turned—'twas even so—yes, Eglantine!
For at the first I had divined the same;
I saw the moon on her shut eyelids shine,
And said "She is asleep:" still on she
came;

Then, on her dimpled feet, I saw it gleam,
And thought—"I know that this is but
a dream."

My darling! O my darling! not the less
My dream went on because I knew it
such;

She came towards me in her loveliness—
A thing too pure, methought, for mortal touch;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

The rippling gold did on her bosom meet,
The long white robe descended to her feet.

The fringed lids dropped low, as sleep-
oppressed;

Her dreamy smile was very fair to see,
And her two hands were folded to her
breast,

With somewhat held between them heed-
fully.

O fast asleep! and yet methought she
knew

And felt my nearness those shut eyelids
through.

She sighed: my tears ran down for tender-
ness—

“And have I drawn thee to me in my
sleep?

Is it for me thou wanderest shelterless,
Wetting thy steps in dewy grasses
deep?

O if this be!” I said—“yet speak to me;
I blame my very dream for cruelty.”

Then from her stainless bosom she did
take

Two beauteous lily flowers that lay
therein,

THE FOUR BRIDGES

And with slow-moving lips a gesture make,
As one that some forgotten words doth
win;

"They floated on the pool," methought
she said,

And water trickled from each lily's head.

It dropped upon her feet—I saw it gleam
Along the ripples of her yellow hair,
And stood apart, for only in a dream
She would have come, methought, to
meet me there.

She spoke again—"Ah fair! ah fresh they
shine!

And there are many left, and these are
mine."

I answered her with flattering accents
meet—

"Love, they are whitest lilies e'er were
blown."

"And sayest thou so?" she sighed in
murmurs sweet;

"I have nought else to give thee now,
mine own!

For it is night. Then take them, love!"
said she:

"They have been costly flowers to thee—
and me."

THE FOUR BRIDGES

While thus she said I took them from
her hand,
And, overcome with love and nearness,
woke;
And overcome with ruth that she should
stand
Barefooted on the grass; that, when she
spoke,
Her mystic words should take so sweet a
tone,
And of all names her lips should choose
"My own."

I rose, I journeyed, neared my home, and
soon
Beheld the spire peer out above the hill:
It was a sunny harvest afternoon,
When by the churchyard wicket, stand-
ing still,
I cast my eager eyes abroad to know
If change had touched the scenes of long
ago.

I looked across the hollow; sunbeams
shone
Upon the old house with the gable ends:
"Save that the laurel-trees are taller
grown,
No change," methought, "to its grey
wall extends.

THE FOUR BRIDGES

What clear bright beams on yonder lattice
shine!

There did I sometime talk with Eglantine."

There standing with my very goal in sight,
Over my haste did sudden quiet steal;
I thought to dally with my own delight,
Nor rush on headlong to my garnered
weal,

But taste the sweetness of a short delay,
And for a little moment hold the bliss at
bay.

The church was open; it perchance might
be

That there to offer thanks I might essay,
Or rather, as I think, that I might see
The place where Eglantine was wont to
pray.

But so it was; I crossed that portal wide,
And felt my riot joy to calm subside.

The low depending curtains, gently swayed,
Cast over arch and roof a crimson glow;
But, ne'ertheless, all silence and all shade
It seemed, save only for the rippling
flow

THE FOUR BRIDGES

Of their long foldings, when the sunset
air
Sighed through the casements of the house
of prayer.

I found her place, the ancient oaken stall,
Where in her childhood I had seen her
sit,
Most saint-like and most tranquil there
of all,
Folding her hands, as if a dreaming fit—
A heavenly vision had before her strayed
Of the Eternal Child in lowly manger
laid.

I saw her prayer-book laid upon the seat,
And took it in my hand, and felt more
near
In fancy to her, finding it most sweet
To think how very oft, low kneeling
there,
In her devout thoughts she had let me
share,
And set my graceless name in her pure
prayer.

My eyes were dazzled with delightful
tears—
In sooth they were the last I ever shed;

THE FOUR BRIDGES

For with them fell the cherished dreams
of years.

I looked, and on the wall above my
head,

Over her seat, there was a tablet placed,
With one word only on the marble traced.—

Ah, well! I would not overstate that woe,
For I have had some blessings, little
care;

But since the falling of that heavy blow,
God's earth has never seemed to me so
fair;

Nor any of His creatures so divine,
Nor sleep so sweet;—the word was—
EGLANTINE.

A Mother
Showing the
Portrait of
Her Child

(F. M. L.)

Living child or pictured cherub
Ne'er o'ermatched its baby grace;
And the mother, moving nearer,
Looked it calmly in the face;
Then with slight and quiet gesture,
And with lips that scarcely smiled,
Said—"A portrait of my daughter
When she was a child."

Easy thought was hers to fathom,
Nothing hard her glance to read,
For it seemed to say, "No praises
For this little child I need:
If you see, I see far better,
And I will not feign to care
For a stranger's prompt assurance
That the face is fair."

HER CHILD'S PORTRAIT

Softly clasped and half extended,
She her dimpled hands doth lay:
So they doubtless placed them, saying—
“Little one, you must not play.”
And while yet his work was growing,
This the painter's hand hath shown,
That the little heart was making
Pictures of its own.

Is it warm in that green valley,
Vale of childhood, where you dwell?
Is it calm in that green valley,
Round whose bournes such great hills
swell?
Are there giants in the valley—
Giants leaving footprints yet?
Are there angels in the valley?
Tell me—I forget.

Answer, answer, for the lilies,
Little one, o'ertop you much,
And the mealy gold within them
You can scarcely reach to touch;
O how far their aspect differs,
Looking up and looking down!
You look up in that green valley—
Valley of renown.

Are there voices in the valley,
Lying near the heavenly gate?

HER CHILD'S PORTRAIT

When it opens, do the harp-strings,
Touched within, reverberate?
When, like shooting-stars, the angels
To your couch at nightfall go,
Are their swift wings heard to rustle?
Tell me! for you know.

Yes, you know; and you are silent,
Not a word shall asking win;
Little mouth more sweet than rosebud,
Fast it locks the secret in.
Not a glimpse upon your present
You unfold to glad my view;
Ah, what secrets of your future
I could tell to you!

Sunny present! thus I read it,
By remembrance of my past:—
Its to-day and its to-morrow
Are as lifetimes vague and vast;
And each face in that green valley
Takes for you an aspect mild,
And each voice grows soft in saying—
"Kiss me, little child!"

As a boon the kiss is granted:
Baby mouth, your touch is sweet,
Takes the love without the trouble
From those lips that with it meet;

HER CHILD'S PORTRAIT

Gives the love, O pure! O tender!
Of the valley where it grows,
But the baby heart receiveth
MORE THAN IT BESTOWS.

Comes the future to the present—
“Ah!” she saith, “too blithe of mood;
Why that smile which seems to whisper—
‘I am happy, God is good’?
God is good: that truth eternal
Sown for you in happier years,
I must tend it in my shadow,
Water it with tears.

“Ah, sweet present! I must lead thee
By a daylight more subdued;
There must teach thee low to whisper—
‘I am mournful, God is good!’”
Peace, thou future! clouds are coming,
Stooping from the mountain crest,
But that sunshine floods the valley
Let her—let her rest.

Comes the future to the present—
“Child,” she saith, “and wilt thou
rest?
How long, child, before thy footsteps
Fret to reach yon cloudy crest?
Ah, the valley!—angels guard it,
But the heights are brave to see;

HER CHILD'S PORTRAIT

Looking down were long contentment:
Come up, child, to me."

So she speaks, but do not heed her,
Little maid with wondrous eyes,
Not afraid, but clear and tender,
Blue, and filled with prophecies;
Thou for whom life's veil unlifted
Hangs, whom warmest valleys fold,
Lift the veil, the charm dissolveth—
Climb, but heights are cold.

There are buds that fold within them,
Closed and covered from our sight,
Many a richly-tinted petal,
Never looked on by the light:
Fain to see their shrouded faces,
Sun and dew are long at strife,
Till at length the sweet buds open—
Such a bud is life.

When the rose of thine own being
Shall reveal its central fold,
Thou shalt look within and marvel,
Fearing what thine eyes behold;
What it shows and what it teaches
Are not things wherewith to part;
Thorny rose! that always costeth
Beatings at the heart.

HER CHILD'S PORTRAIT

Look in fear, for there is dimness;
 Ills unshapen float anigh.
Look in awe: for this same nature
 Once the Godhead deigned to die.
Look in love, for He doth love it,
 And its tale is best of lore:
Still humanity grows dearer,
 Being learned the more.

Learn, but not the less bethink thee
 How that all can mingle tears;
But this joy can none discover,
 Save to them that are his peers;
And that they whose lips do utter
 Language such as bards have sung—
Lo! their speech shall be to many
 As an unknown tongue.

Learn, that if to thee the meaning
 Of all other eyes be shown,
Fewer eyes can ever front thee
 That are skilled to read thine own;
And that if thy love's deep current
 Many another's far outflows,
Then thy heart must take for ever
 LESS THAN IT BESTOWS.

STRIFE AND PEACE

A man of strife, in wrathful mood
He neared the nurse's door;
With poplar leaves the roof and eaves
Were thickly scattered o'er,
And yellow as they a sunbeam lay
Along the cottage floor.

"Sleep on, thou pretty, pretty lamb,"
He hears the fond nurse say;
"And if angels stand at thy right hand,
As now belike they may,
And if angels meet at thy bed's feet,
I fear them not this day.

"Come wealth, come want to thee, dear
heart,
It was all one to me,
For thy pretty tongue far sweeter rung
Than coined gold and fee;
And even the while thy waking smile
It was right fair to see.

"Sleep, pretty bairn, and never know
Who grudged and who transgressed;
Thee to retain I was full fain,
But God, He knoweth best!
And His peace upon thy brow lies plain
As the sunshine on thy breast!"

STRIFE AND PEACE

The man of strife, he enters in,
Looks, and his pride doth cease;
Anger and sorrow shall be to-morrow
Trouble, and no release;
But the babe whose life awoke the strife
Hath entered into peace.

